

## The Routledge handbook of social work and addictive behaviors

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The editors provide a clear and compelling rationale for why the social work profession needs this handbook. The book aims to serve as a comprehensive and practical source of knowledge on the origins and emergence of addictive behaviours while highlighting their prevalence in various global communities. Its primary focus is to present the current understanding of effective solutions, enabling informed practices, education, and research in social work and other professions. By informing these disciplines about addictive behaviours, the book strives to foster collaborative problem-solving approaches to address issues associated with addiction. It emphasises embracing diverse perspectives, theories, disciplines, systems, and levels to ensure successful addiction prevention and intervention.

If you are from a country where addiction and substance use are central to the social work curriculum, this book is for you. However, it has limited relevance to social workers in Aotearoa New Zealand (Aotearoa). Social work education in Aotearoa on substance use and addiction is minimal. Readers may struggle to find the relevance to social work practice within some chapters.

The book is separated into five sections. The first outlines the scope and nature of addictive behaviours and related problems.

The second section explores addictive behaviour across the lifespan and within specific populations. The third discusses interventions to prevent and address problematic substance use. The fourth explores issues, like family violence, that frequently co-occur with substance use. The concluding section includes an astute chapter on including substance use education within the social work curriculum to support the changing scope of practice.

Chapters 3, 11, 12 and 22 refer to the insidious impact of problematic alcohol use. This is highly relevant given that alcohol is the substance that causes the most harm in Aotearoa. Chapter 4 examines how addiction affects the brain, and Chapter 5 explores the role of genes and the environment in shaping addictive behaviour. These chapters provide up-to-date research and evidence that dispels earlier, and potentially harmful, views on substance use.

Chapter 6 explores psychological models of addictive behaviour. Audrey Begun critiques the disease model of addiction and, through evidence, shows that the model and the belief that some people have an “addictive personality” is flawed. The content in this chapter is important given that the 12-step disease philosophy is sometimes embedded within alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment programmes and interventions in Aotearoa.

Chapter 7 is interesting from a social work perspective as it explores the interplay between social, environmental, and genetic links to problematic substance use. It provides clear examples of how addiction manifests from the micro to macro levels and helps increase the understanding of the complex interplay involved in how addiction can develop. However, there is a lack of information and robust discussion on structural factors and system-level solutions to minimise harm from substance use. For example, the authors rarely explore the intersection between substance use, poverty, housing, neighbourhood, education, employment, and home environment.

In Chapter 11, the authors explore the evidence, theory and insights relating to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and highlight the importance of “sensitive and culturally appropriate” practice (p. 180). There is also a helpful section on the importance of non-stigmatising language, which is critical for social workers to understand and use in practice.

At times, there are too many statistics, which feel irrelevant to the social work scope of practice here in Aotearoa (i.e., Chapter 13). Readers without a basic understanding of domestic substance use statistics, interventions, and treatment options in Aotearoa will likely struggle.

Section III, “Interventions to prevent and address addictive behavior and related problems”, is the most illuminating and relevant section because it explores evidence-based strategies for working with tangata whai ora (people seeking wellness), whānau and communities impacted by substance use. This section examines how service delivery and policy can better prevent and treat problematic substance use and related behaviours.

For example, in Chapter 18, Allen Zweben and Brooke West provide a template for incorporating substance use screening

questions into assessments. The authors give a range of questions that canvas problem severity, life events and impacts from substance use, motivation for change, social support and strengths and capabilities. This chapter emphasises that social workers must feel comfortable asking about substance use to identify those at risk or experiencing problematic use. Gathering this information empowers the social worker to intervene or refer the person for appropriate treatment.

Chapter 22 is particularly relevant to social workers working with children in the care and protection sector. Shulamith Ashenberg Straussner and Christine Fewell explore how to work with children with parents engaged in problematic substance use. The authors present a range of holistic family and community-level interventions beyond removing the child into state care. Even though the chapter alludes to strength and resilience factors as important to explore in an assessment, it is deficit focused. However, the authors provide further resources to explore, including evidence-based interventions involving parenting practices and substance use treatment. Unfortunately, many excellent interventions, like community reinforcement and family training (CRAFT), are unavailable in Aotearoa.

Another noteworthy section is Chapter 34, in which Cecilia Mengo and Kenneth Leonard delve into the complex interplay between substance misuse and intimate partner violence (IPV). The authors stress the need for interventions that address substance use and IPV. Again, this is not widely acknowledged or addressed within social work practice or at an organisational and policy level in Aotearoa. The authors recommend that social services and social workers develop expertise in working holistically with tangata whai ora who are victims of IPV and who present with co-existing mental health and substance use issues.

The social justice mandate social workers proclaim as being at the forefront of our work is often missing from the literature about substance use, and this book is no exception. While useful in parts, some of the book is irrelevant to social workers in Aotearoa. However,

it is still a worthwhile read. Any book containing evidence-based interventions and substance use strategies is of benefit, especially given the lack of meaningful substance use and addiction education within the social work curriculum in Aotearoa.

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