

Drug and Behavioural Addictions: COVID-19 and Beyond

Online Symposium

Wednesday, July 7th, 2021

8:55 – 13:30 BST

[Register via Eventbrite](#)



Through seminars and discussion, this online symposium will explore the impact of COVID-19 on various forms of addiction and their treatment.

There is an immediate need to pool an understanding of how the pandemic has impacted alcohol intake, drug use, and behavioural addictions. Collating this knowledge can help doctors and mental health professionals improve patient care by being aware of what's happening during the pandemic and being prepared for potential mental health changes in their clients.

The Sussex Addiction Research and Intervention Centre (SARIC), which is hosting this knowledge exchange event, hopes to bring people together to (a) discuss how COVID-19 has impacted addiction-related mental health issues and (b) stimulate action to help prevent and treat potential addictions.

Session 1: Drug & Alcohol Use During COVID-19 (8:55–11:30)

- **Abhijit Nadkarni** (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK): *'I drink, therefore I am': Stories from India.*
- **Fiona Walker** (University of Sussex, UK): *The effect of health messages on intentions to consume alcohol during the Covid-19 lockdown.*
- **Sarah Osborn and Nicholas Sinclair-House** (University of Sussex, UK): *COVID-19, alcohol and drugs: Trends and changes through lockdown and beyond.*
- **Aldo Badiani** (Sapienza University, Italy; University of Sussex, UK): *COVID-19 prevalence in people with opioid use disorder.*
- **Amanda Roxburgh** (Burnet Institute, Australia): *The Impact of COVID-19 on Supervised injecting facilities in Australia.*

Session 2: Compulsivity & Behavioural Addictions During COVID-19 (11:30–13:30)

- **Lucy Albertella and Erynn Christensen** (Monash University, Australia): *Behavioural addictions during COVID-19: Predictors of risk and resilience.*
- **Ornella Corazza** (University of Hertfordshire, UK): *The impact of physical distancing on body image, exercise addiction and the use of performance and image enhancing drugs.*
- **Zsolt Demetrovics** (Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming, University of Gibraltar, Gibraltar; ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary): *Changes in addictive and problematic behaviours in Hungary during the COVID-19-related lockdowns.*
- **Anders C Håkansson** (Lund University, Sweden): *COVID-19, changes in gambling activity, and self-exclusion in Sweden.*

Register on [Eventbrite](#). A zoom link will be distributed to registered attendees in advance.

The full agenda, with abstracts, will be made available on the [SARIC website](#).

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Detailed Agenda



Session 1: Drug & Alcohol Use During COVID-19 (8:55 – 11:30, with breaks)

Time	Speaker	Title	Description
8:55 – 9:00	Bryan Singer University of Sussex, UK		Welcome
9:00 – 9:20	Abhijit Nadkarni London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK	<i>'I drink, therefore I am': Stories from India</i>	In my talk I will contextualise the epidemiology of alcohol use and alcohol use disorders in India on the background of the COVID-19 pandemic. I will give illustrative examples of how the pandemic influenced the drinking and drinking outcomes in India, with a special focus on the national lockdown. I will also share some preliminary data from our online survey examining the impact of the pandemic. Finally, I will end with some lessons from our existing intervention models and the relevance of such models in the current times.
9:20 – 9:40	Fiona Walker University of Sussex, UK	<i>The effect of health messages on intentions to consume alcohol during the Covid-19 lockdown</i>	My study explored drinking behaviour during the Covid-19 lockdown; and whether a context-relevant health message about alcohol and immunity would have a greater impact on cognitive precursors of drinking than other messages. I will discuss my findings that participants receiving an immunity focused message were more motivated to adhere to low-risk drinking guidelines than those exposed to other health messages or a control message.
9:40 – 9:50	Discussion		
9:50 – 10:00	Break		
10:00 – 10:20	Sarah Osborn and Nicholas Sinclair-House University of Sussex, UK	<i>COVID-19, alcohol and drugs: Trends and changes through lockdown and beyond.</i>	In 2020 we examined changes in drug and alcohol use following the introduction of social distancing measures and lockdowns in Europe, Canada and the US, detecting a general trend away from stimulant drugs and towards sedative drugs. In addressing some of the limitations of this earlier work by widening our scope and incorporating more recent data, we have been able to add detail to our initial findings and explore the question of whether observed changes in usage patterns reverse as social distancing measures are eased, or whether some changes prove more persistent than others. We have also developed some superficially contradictory findings which begin to suggest distinct sub-groups within alcohol- and drug-using populations with respect to the impact of lockdown on increasing or reducing substance-use within specific classes.
10:20 – 10:40	Aldo Badiani Sapienza University, Italy University of Sussex, UK	<i>COVID-19 prevalence in people with opioid use disorder</i>	Previous reports have suggested that the prevalence of COVID-19 might be lower in individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD) than in the general population. In this preliminary study, we explored the prevalence of COVID-19 and the seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in a sample of clients of Villa Maraini Foundation, an ONG affiliated to the International Red Cross-Red Crescent that provides free services to drug users in

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			the metropolitan area of Rome. One-hundred-fifty-five individuals (26 women) with OUD were enrolled in the study. The mean age (\pm SD) was 45.7 \pm 9.5 for men and 41.5 \pm 10.2 for women. Most of the participants received long term replacement treatment with methadone (86.5%) or buprenorphine (2.6%). Only 2.6% of the participants in the study had received the vaccine at the time the study was conducted (June 2021). Only 1 participant had been diagnosed with COVID-19, indicating a cumulative prevalence of 0.64%. The cumulative prevalence of COVID-19 in the general population at the same date was 7%. The seroprevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in the sample was 1.9% (including the single case of COVID-19 case and 2 asymptomatic cases). Seroprevalence data for the general population at the same date are not available. These findings support the notion that individuals with OUD are less vulnerable to COVID-19, despite the high prevalence of chronic comorbidities (47.1%). Follow-up studies including control groups are underway to further investigate the mechanisms responsible for this surprising phenomenon.
10:40 – 11:00	Amanda Roxburgh Burnet Institute, Australia	<i>The Impact of COVID-19 on Supervised Injecting Facilities in Australia</i>	This presentation will outline how the two supervised injecting facilities in Australia adapted through COVID-19. It will investigate the challenges services faced to remain open, the challenges clients faced, the impact on client visits and drug markets, and the learnings from the last 12 months.
11:00 – 11:15	Discussion		
11:15 – 11:30	Break		

Session 2: Compulsivity & Behavioural Addictions During COVID-19 (11:30 – 13:30, with breaks)

Time	Speaker	Title	Description
11:30 – 11:50	Lucy Albertella and Erynn Christensen Monash University, Australia	<i>Behavioural addictions during COVID-19: Predictors of risk and resilience</i>	The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in high levels of psychological distress worldwide and increases across several different addictive behaviours as individuals seek to cope with their distress. Behavioural addictions, which can be as impairing and distressing for an individual as traditional addictions, appear to have been especially influenced by COVID-19. Understanding the modifiable and/or easily identifiable factors that predict increases in behavioural addictions during COVID-19 can inform clinical practice in terms of assessing risk and advising lifestyle change & support. Toward this aim, the current talk will present the findings from our national longitudinal study, with a focus on lifestyle- and health-related predictors of risk and resilience across four different addictive behaviours: problematic gambling, problematic pornography use, problematic internet use, and excessive eating. Implications of the findings will be discussed.

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11:50 – 12:10	Ornella Corazza University of Hertfordshire, UK	<i>The impact of Physical Distancing on Body Image, Exercise Addiction and the use of Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs.</i>	Little is known about the impact of restrictive measures during the COVID-19 pandemic on self-image and engagement in exercise and other coping strategies alongside the use of image and performance enhancing drugs (IPED). During this talk, the results of a cross-sectional investigation involving various psychometric measures among 3,161 participants based in seven countries will be presented. Considerations on the implementation of more targeted responses, especially for vulnerable individuals, will be shared by the PI of the study.
12:10 – 12:20	Discussion		
12:20 – 12:30	Break		
12:30 – 12:50	Zsolt Demetrovics Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming, University of Gibraltar, Gibraltar ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary	<i>Changes in addictive and problematic behaviors in Hungary during the COVID-19-related lockdowns</i>	As the global COVID-19 pandemic reached Hungary, a nationwide lockdown was enforced. To explore whether there is a risk for developing potentially problematic online and offline behaviors (i.e., gambling, online gaming, pornography use, compulsive sexual behavior, social media use, substance use), a longitudinal self-report survey study was conducted in Hungary (T1: N = 1747; 847 female; Mage = 41.9, SD = 12.55), at three different stages of lockdown (complete, partial, and minimal extent). Besides the aforementioned behaviors, several indicators of ill-being (e.g., perceived stress, depressive mood, loneliness, sensation seeking, anxiety about the future and general well-being) and items about COVID-19 involvement were assessed. Potential changes in the frequency and problematic engagement in the aforementioned behaviors will be presented in an exploratory manner, considering the roles of ill-being indicators.
12:50 – 13:10	Anders C Håkansson Lund University, Sweden	<i>COVID-19, changes in gambling activity, and self-exclusion in Sweden</i>	Anders Håkansson and his research group has carried out a number of surveys and objective measures of gambling behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. In his talk, Anders Håkansson presents data describing what may have changed - and what hasn't - with respect to gambling during the pandemic. In addition, Sweden has a unique, nationwide multi-operator self-exclusion service, and data from this will also be presented.
13:10 – 13:20	Discussion		
13:20 – 13:30	Final Discussion (can go later than 13:30 as needed)		