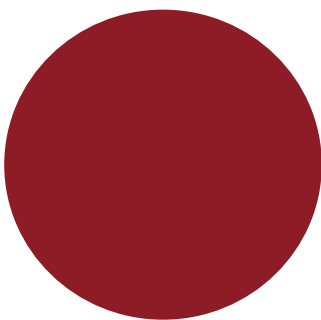


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## Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery



**By: Scottish Families Affected  
by Alcohol and Drugs and the  
Scottish Recovery Consortium**

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# INSERT STANDARD STIGMATISING HEADLINE & IMAGE HERE

Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery

*‘The media need to not report what they think people want to hear but what they need to hear (funnily enough it may be a more positive message). There needs to be a cultural shift that media has a part in influencing.’*

– Person in Recovery

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# 1. Introduction

**Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs** and the **Scottish Recovery Consortium** have collaborated to research how addiction and recovery from substances were portrayed in the Scottish media between the period of late 2017 to mid-2019 after both charities shared concerns around the stigma towards people with addictions, and the lack of lived experience highlighted in the media.

*Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery* started just ahead of the announcement of the 2018 drug-related death statistics in Scotland which were published on 16 July 2019. Based on previous years, it was expected that there would be a lot of media attention around the announcement which would provide plenty of content to analyse for our project.

It was expected that there would be a change in the tone of how the media reported on addictions and recovery when the drug-related death statistics were released. The media was expected to become more compassionate in their reporting, but the period before and the period after the statistics were expected to contain more stigmatising language and images, and a general lack of lived experience and support information. Knowing that there were going to be different tones and themes picked up in articles and reports, we decided to complete a thematic analysis over the period of late 2017 to mid-2019.

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs supports anyone affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use, which includes family members, friends, colleagues, and anyone you say is your family. The Scottish Recovery Consortium supports, represents and connects recovery across Scotland by working with recovery in all its forms, including the Recoverists network and a large community of people in recovery. With these large communities of people in recovery and family members, we were able to consult with them through an online survey and a face-to-face workshop to gather their views and opinions on the media's portrayal of addiction and recovery.

The thematic analysis of articles and reports, the online survey and the face-to-face workshop gave us a bank of information and content to answer our main question of how addiction and recovery is being portrayed in the Scottish media.



## Aims of Rewriting the Media:

- To analyse the portrayal of addiction and recovery in the media through a thematic analysis of media articles and reports from late 2017 to mid-2019
- To consult Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs and the Scottish Recovery Consortium's communities through an online survey and face-to-face workshop
- To write and provide recommendations to journalists and editors on best practice for reporting on addiction and recovery.

## 2. Summary and Key Recommendations

Based on our findings from *Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery*, we have **six** recommendations for journalists and editors.

We can work together to create a safe space for people in recovery and people impacted by someone else's substance use. We can all share positive messages and give the space and opportunity for people to share their stories and to highlight support services and recovery communities across Scotland.

## Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery: Six Recommendations for Journalists and Editors

## 1. Use positive imagery



Images of drugs, broken bottles, paraphernalia and people in vulnerable conditions are negative and stigmatising and should be avoided. This reflects the general stock images of alcohol and drugs that are used in most media articles.

Michaela (left) discusses her experiences here but the imagery focuses on her happy in recovery with her rescue chickens that are an important part of her recovery journey.

Make the images more human, positive and responsible. Use photos of the people who are interviewed, support services, or the community you are talking about.

To the right is an image from the campaign *My Recovery Gave Me*. A selection of images were launched in 2013 by the Scottish Recovery Consortium where positive images of recovery were created to combat the negative pictures of addiction that are commonly used.



## 2. Adopt People-First language

Stigmatising language such as ‘*user*’ and ‘*addict*’ are seen time and time again in news articles. We see ‘*drug abuse*’, ‘*drug user*’, and many variants. People who are interviewed are titled ‘*ex-addict*’ or ‘*former drug abuser*’. All of this terminology is judgemental and causes harm. Journalists and editors should use **People-First language** when reporting on addiction and recovery.

A brilliant resource is '*Language Matters*' which was developed by the Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies (NADA) in Australia and is used regularly by Scottish charities, organisations and services when talking about addiction.

For example, instead of saying ‘*abuse*’ you can say ‘*substance use*’. Or rather than saying ‘*drug user*’ you can say ‘*person who uses drugs*’.

We recommend that **People-First language** is used as standard for anyone reporting on addiction. The one-page resource can be found here -

[https://www.nada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/language\\_matters\\_online\\_final.pdf](https://www.nada.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/language_matters_online_final.pdf).



### 3. Use your article as an opportunity to educate

Lived experience stories will be more educational (and may be more interesting for readers) than political quotes and statistics. By including honest accounts of addiction and recovery, you can promote the message that people can and do recover from addiction.

People usually remember a story more vividly if there is a personal story included. By including personal accounts, people can relate or empathise more with the people involved, thus educating society about addiction.

### 4. Always include support service information

Support information should always be included at the end of any article that is reporting on addiction. We have included some organisations below that you can include in your reporting:

#### **Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs**

*A national charity that supports anyone affected by someone's alcohol or drug use*

Helpline: 08080 10 10 11

Helpline email: [helpline@sfad.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sfad.org.uk)

Website: [www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk)

#### **Scottish Recovery Consortium**

*Supports, represents and connects recovery across Scotland*

Phone: 0141 552 1355

Website: [www.scottishrecoveryconsortium.org](http://www.scottishrecoveryconsortium.org)

#### **Scottish Drugs Forum**

*Scotland's national resource of expertise on drugs and related issues*

Phone: (Glasgow) 0141 221 1175 (Edinburgh) 0131 221 9300

Website: [www.sdf.org.uk](http://www.sdf.org.uk)

#### **Alcohol Focus Scotland**

*A national charity working to reduce alcohol harm*

Phone: 0141 572 6700

Email: [enquiries@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)

Website: [www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)

#### **Crew 2000**

*A harm reduction and outreach charity based in Scotland*

Phone: 0131 220 3404

Email: [admin@crew2000.org.uk](mailto:admin@crew2000.org.uk)

Website: [www.crew.scot](http://www.crew.scot)

#### **SHAAP (Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems)**

*SHAAP aims to provide an authoritative medical voice on the impact of alcohol on the health of the people of Scotland and to campaign for action to reduce this harm*

Phone: 0131 247 3667

Email: [shaap@rcpe.ac.uk](mailto:shaap@rcpe.ac.uk)

Website: <https://www.shaap.org.uk>

#### **Know the Score**

*Information and facts about drugs*

Website: <https://knowthescore.info>

## 5. Learn about lived experience and the impact of stigma

There are many support groups and recovery communities across Scotland who are happy and willing to speak to journalists.

Both Scottish Families and the Scottish Recovery Consortium are keen to work with journalism and media students to address this issue from the outset and help encourage positive reporting of this topic by the future workforce.

There are also regular events such as Recovery Walk Scotland<sup>1</sup> which journalists can attend to learn more about recovery.

We recommend that journalists and editors reach out to groups and communities to learn more about their work.

Scottish Families service directory is full of support groups, treatment services and community groups across Scotland you may wish to contact. - <https://www.sfad.org.uk/service-directory>

## 6. Include more positive stories reflecting recovery, support, and lived/living experiences

There are many people in Scotland who are happy to share their story, as they want to be able to help other people get into support and recovery. We want journalists and editors to move beyond the urgent ask of '*do you have a case study we can speak to today?*' towards spending time to get to know people and learn more about their experiences.

People deserve to be treated as humans rather than labelled as a '*case study*'. A person's story can be ignored because it is not '*interesting enough*', but every single person's story is worth telling, and their experience will help someone else.



<sup>1</sup> <https://twitter.com/recwalkscot>

### 3. Methodology

Our methodology consisted of a thematic analysis of media articles, an online survey, a face-to-face workshop, and we also completed some secondary research before starting the project.

#### 3.1. Secondary Research

The National Union of Journalists 'Responsible Reporting on Mental Health, Mental Illness and Death by Suicide' Guidelines<sup>2</sup> was the main resource we had for starting *Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery*. The Guidelines were released in 2014:

*'The guidelines were prepared by the National Union of Journalists in Scotland with significant input from Dr Sallyanne Duncan, senior lecturer in journalism at the University of Strathclyde, whose research interests include media reporting of trauma, death, bereavement, mental health and suicide, and has a number of published works in that field. The Scottish Government also supported the guidelines with funding and with the input from a range of stakeholders which included Choose Life, See Me and the Samaritans<sup>3</sup>.'*

We know that mental health and addiction are often connected (commonly known as 'dual diagnosis') and have many similarities e.g. where people who experience a mental health problem may drink alcohol or take drugs as a way of coping, or where the experience of addiction leads to a deterioration in mental health. There is still an unnecessary gap between mental health and addiction care and treatment, and it causes a lot of strain and difficulty for individuals.

In the Guidelines there was a small mention of alcohol and drugs on page 4 where drug and alcohol addiction are labelled as mental illnesses. It was also mentioned on page 6 where 'psychosis is triggered by other mental or physical conditions, or as a result of alcohol or drug misuse.' There were one or two other mentions of alcohol and drugs but no significant mention of how alcohol and drug use should be reported on in the media.

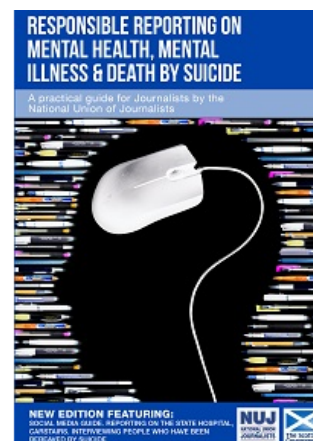


Figure 1: NUJ Guidelines Cover

There are also no specific Guidelines from the National Union of Journalists to 'responsibly report on alcohol and drugs'.

Further findings from the Guidelines can be found in section 4 of this report.

#### 3.2. Online Survey

We used *SurveyMonkey* to create an online survey that we could share with our communities by direct email and on our Twitter and Facebook channels. We received a total of 50 responses. The participants were asked to respond to a series of questions which included examples of headlines and images from articles. They were also asked to share their opinions on how they think addiction and recovery are portrayed in the media.

Example of questions included:

*Do you think drug and alcohol issues are reported on in the right way in the media?*

*What do you think of the language used in this headline?*

*How would you suggest people involved in the media could gain a better understanding of the impact articles can have on people in recovery, their family, their community and wider society?*

A summary of the key statistics collected from the online survey can be found in section 4 of this report. Further data can be found in the appendix.

### **3.3. Face to Face Workshop**

We arranged a face-to-face workshop with four participants at the Scottish Recovery Consortium office in Glasgow in November 2019. The aim of the workshop was to collect visual pieces of work which show how people would like to see addiction and recovery portrayed in the media, and to highlight any issues.

The four participants involved had different backgrounds including being in recovery, working in the recovery community and being family members affected by someone else's substance use.

A number of articles taken from our analysis were printed onto A3 paper and were left on a table for participants to pick up and read over. The articles chosen were:

- *'Call for drug addicts to be given free bus passes' – The Scotsman*<sup>4</sup>
- *'Outcry over drug abuse after photo shows 'spice zombies' slumped on bench in town centre' – The Independent*<sup>5</sup>
- *'Scotland on the brink of becoming the drug death capital of the world as grim figures soar' – Daily Record*<sup>6</sup>
- *'Scotland in grip of drugs crisis as more than 1,000 die every year with deadly pills costing less than Mars bar' – ITV News*<sup>7</sup>

We asked the participants to then annotate their thoughts and reactions to the language, headline, imagery and story of each article in red ink.

The fully annotated articles are in Appendix 1 of this report.

### **3.4. Thematic Analysis of Media Articles and Reports**

We gathered a total of 23 news articles and reports written between late 2017 to mid-2019 to read and analyse as part of our research. A full list of the articles and reports can be found in the appendix of this report. It was found in the analysis that there were similar themes throughout the articles and reports including stigmatising content such as language and images, lack of lived experience, a lack of positive messages, a lack of support information, and a variety of political debates.

The thematic analysis identified recurring themes throughout the selection of articles and reports which were then further explored.

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4 <https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/call-drug-addicts-be-given-free-bus-passes-1417502>

5 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/outcry-drug-abuse-photo-spice-zombies-slumped-bench-bridgend-a8402266.html>

6 <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotland-brink-becoming-drug-death-18211164>

7 <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-06-27/drugs-now-bigger-killer-than-alcohol-in-scotland-with-deadly-pill-costing-less-than-mars-bar/>





The themes identified were:

- Stigmatising Images
- Showing Dignity and Respect
- ‘Horror’ Language
- Education
- Stigma
- Political Debates

The findings for the analysis can be found in section 4 of this report.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Secondary Research Findings

The National Union of Journalists ‘*Responsible Reporting on Mental Health, Mental Illness and Death by Suicide*’ Guidelines proved to be a valuable resource for this project.

There are no specific Guidelines from the National Union of Journalists to ‘responsibly report on alcohol and drugs’ but within these Guidelines we noted many similarities between mental health and addiction, and how these Guidelines should also be adopted when reporting on addiction and recovery.

On the first page of the Guidelines, there is a list of ‘*Dos and Don’ts when reporting issues or news about mental health, mental ill health and deaths by suicide*’. These include:

#### Do

- Report mental health, mental ill health and death by suicide sensitively
- Ensure you use correct diagnosis where appropriate
- Use medical terms correctly
- Focus on help, support and treatments
- Offer contact details such as helplines

#### Don’t

- Use derogatory language
- Stigmatise mental health and mental illness
- Assume link between mental illness and violence
- Dismiss mental illness as a fad
- Discriminate against those with mental illnesses
- Glamorise or sensationalise
- Use colloquialisms such as: -
  - o ‘happy pills’ for anti-depressants
  - o ‘cocktail’ of drugs for overdose
  - o ‘shrink’ for psychiatrist

As we will explore further in the thematic analysis, there are a lot of ‘don’ts’ from the above list that appear in the articles and reports. Mostly including language, stigma, sensationalising and colloquialisms.

The Guidelines then go on to share personal stories from journalists who have experienced a mental health problem, and then at the end there are pages filled with information about support services and organisations that journalists can link to in their articles and reports.



Over the years there has been an incredible shift in reporting on mental health in the media. With articles such as this from the Evening Standard '*Male mental health: Why we need to talk about the boys*'<sup>8</sup> is filled with positive imagery, lived experience stories and a positive response with supportive information. This is the kind of positive reporting that we should be seeing with addiction and recovery.

## 4.2 Online Survey Findings

There were 50 responses to the online survey. The participants were asked to respond to a series of questions which included examples of headlines and images from articles. They were also asked to share their opinions on how they think addiction and recovery are portrayed in the media.

A summary is given below on the main responses to the survey.

### Summary of survey results:

- 98% of responses said that they didn't think alcohol and drug issues were reported in the media in the right way
- 80% of responses said that an image showing a needle in a street was harmful to people in recovery
- An image of heroin paraphernalia was considered the most stigmatising image
- 80% of responses said that headlines including the word 'addicts' were harmful to people in recovery
- 100% of responses said that people involved in the media should be more aware of the impact their work can have on an individual, their family, their community and wider society
- 98% of responses said all articles discussing alcohol, drug and other addictions should include information on support
- 100% of responses agree that there should be guidelines for discussing addiction and recovery.

## 4.3 Face to Face Workshop Findings

Six annotated media articles and reports were collected at the face-to-face workshop from the participants. The participants were asked to choose an article or report and annotate their thoughts and reactions to the language, headline, imagery and story in red ink.

Several of the participants looked at the selection and said 'I remember this one...' because the story was so memorable with its headline and images.

A lot of the conversation at the workshop was around how there was so much negative language in the media and that it made it difficult for something positive to come out of it.

There was also discussion around the educational quality of reporting and how they were highlighting the main issues that had to be addressed. But it was felt that the overall tone itself was

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/wellness/mens-health-mental-health-investigation-oasis-academy-south-bank-students-a4132436.html>

negative rather than positive. It was also noted that none of the articles and reports had support information included in them.

We have included one of the annotated reports below, along with the workshop annotations, and the others can be found in Appendix 3 of this report.

27 June 2019 at 6:15pm

## Scotland in grip of drugs crisis as ~~more than 1,000 die every year with deadly pills costing less than Mars bar~~

- It's a serious emergency, make the headline serious.

More than 1,000 people have died from drugs in one year in Scotland for the first time (and the crisis is seemingly fuelled by a pill sold for less than a chocolate bar.)

- I'm sure it's not just a single pill causing it

ITV News understands statistics set to be published next month will show drug deaths in the country have hit a record high.

While figures from England and Wales have stabilised in recent years, drug deaths have doubled in the past decade in Scotland and are accelerating.

In almost two thirds of these deaths, the sedative benzodiazepine was found in the bloodstream.

Highlight this drug more - it's important to

These so-called "Street Valiums" can be bought for just 30p per pill, even somewhere as crowded and busy as central Glasgow during rush hour.

The crisis also raises questions over Scotland's treatment of addicts as almost half the people who died in Scotland's drug capital Dundee had methadone in the bloodstream.

Shaming a city

These are people receiving treatment for addiction who are dying in record numbers.

The Scottish Government says it is putting together a drug taskforce to look into the crisis.

- expand? what's the outcome?



Pills vary in strength and there is no way of users knowing for sure what they are taking as batches can be made from different drugs of different potency.

When mixed with heroin, methadone, or something as readily available as alcohol, they can be lethal.

highlight polyuse

They suppress the respiratory system – meaning the user could just stop breathing.

Experts say these drugs are far more commonplace in Scotland than elsewhere and are particularly popular among problem drug-users, who mix them as part of a cocktail of substances.

This should not be allowed.

There were 3,756 deaths related to drug poisoning in England in Wales in 2017, slightly up from 3,744 the year before, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The National Records of Scotland reports there were 934 drug-related deaths in 2017, which is an increase of 66 (8%) from 2016.

This was the largest number ever recorded, and 479 (105%) higher than the figure for 2007, which was 455.

To put this into context, in England and Wales there were 66.1 drug-poisoning deaths per million in the population in 2017.

There were 140 in Scotland on average between 2013 and 2017.

One addict told ITV News she has no intention of quitting despite losing six friends in the past three weeks.

Paula Clare says she gets "unbearable pains" in her stomach and feels sick when she doesn't use them.

"You see when you don't have them, you can't look anyone in the eye... there's something in them that's different from normal Valium," Paula said. "You've got to get them or you can't function right."

Another user, who did not want to give his name, said he had had "80 pills already" when we spoke to him. He claimed you can get pills easily and that they keep him "level-headed". Other users said most people take between 20-30 pills at a time to get a buzz.

ITV News filmed in central Glasgow where dealers offered our crew pills during rush hour in front of big crowds - 50 for £20 or 25 for £10. They're just as accessible outside the city, even around 20 miles east of Inverness in rural Moray, where the pills can be ordered online.

Dr Craig McKenzie from Dundee University compared the killer pills to "Russian roulette" because each one can greatly vary in substance in strength despite appearing identical.

- shaming

Minister for health and Dundee MSP Joe FitzPatrick said: "Even across Scotland there are differences in terms of the drug use, we need to make sure that we're able to provide appropriate support." He said the Government "absolutely" needs to look at how support can be provided and added: "That is why I am setting up the expert group, to look at what more we can do."

He promised: "If I can save one life I will do"

This is important and should be at the top



~ should this lady have been interviewed? vulnerable person

## 4.4 Thematic Analysis Findings

Themes that were identified from the 23 news articles and reports written between late 2017 to mid-2019 were:

- Stigmatising Images
- Showing Dignity and Respect
- 'Horror' Language
- Education
- Stigma
- Political Debates

We looked more in depth at each theme across the selection of articles and reports and have written the findings for each theme below.

### 4.4.1 Stigmatising Images

The majority of the 23 news articles and reports included a stigmatising image – the most common image was of drug paraphernalia. These images reinforce the misrepresentation and stigma of people who use alcohol and drugs. The images often perpetuate common beliefs including public disorder, shame, uncleanliness, depravity, and fear. The tone coming from these images appear to try and make society fear people who use alcohol and drugs.

**In our online survey, 80% of responses said that an article including an image of a needle in a street was the most harmful to people in recovery. A key finding of the survey was also that stigmatising images were a top priority that people wanted to see change in the media.**

Most of the articles and reports also had an image that would misrepresent the story it was reporting on. Stories which included lived experiences, drug-related deaths in a specific Scottish city, and even a story on travel all had misrepresentative images that emphasised stereotypes rather than accompanying the story.



Figure 2: Daily Record

The media can have a positive and informative role to play when sharing stories about addiction. But the use of these images only contributes to the ever-growing stigma of addiction. People will regularly read newspapers, go online or watch broadcast coverage of the daily headlines and the first thing they will see is a headline and an image. By having these stigmatising images in their articles, journalists and editors are continuing to drive the stigma of addiction.

***‘...young people should be protected from such images on the internet and media.’***

– Survey Response

Misrepresentation is very common with journalists and editors when reporting on alcohol and drugs. Even positive or educational stories are regularly accompanied by a stigmatising image that changes the perspective of the reader. Images force readers to misunderstand the true stories because their eye will always be drawn to the image first.





Figure 3: The Scotsman

For example, the article to the left is from The Scotsman<sup>9</sup>. It reported on a pilot project in Aberdeenshire to give people with addiction problems concessionary travel, because it was proven that this greatly increased attendance at healthcare appointments. This inevitably supported people into recovery because travel was no longer a barrier. However, the original image used was of a person lying down in a street with a needle in their arm (published 07/05/2019). After comments from the people who were interviewed in the article, the image was changed (edited 15/05/2019) to this image of a hooded person covering their face. Interestingly, the updated image still doesn't represent the story of the article.

We asked people who took our online survey to tell us what their first thought was when they looked at the image from The Scotsman. They replied:

*'Despair and embarrassment'*

*'Shame'*

*'Hopelessness'*

The replies show that people felt the image was negative and created a different emotion and tone to what the article was about. A picture of a bus or a travel pass would have been a better choice.

Images of needles, types of drugs, and how people use drugs have a huge impact on how society views people with addictions. They also have a negative impact on people with addictions in terms of how they view themselves, but we are still exposed to a large number of these images in most articles about addiction.



Figure 4: Dundee Courier

These two articles also use stigmatising images. One is from the Dundee Courier<sup>10</sup> about the city of Dundee and how it had the highest number of drug-related deaths in Scotland (article published 04/07/2018). The other article is from BBC News (next page)<sup>11</sup> about Scotland having the highest drug-death rate in the EU (published 16/07/2019). Both of these are very important stories to report on. However, were the images they chose to represent the article appropriate? Or did they just reinforce the stigma? An image of Dundee or a map of Scotland could have taken their place rather than the drug paraphernalia image used. We believe those little changes could have made a difference to the article.

*'Journalists should be better educated on stigma and learn how to use terms which are not going to further damage public opinion.'*

– Survey Response

Choosing an image for your article may be a second thought to journalists and editors because the story takes priority. But the choices they make can cause harm to others.

9 <https://www.scotsman.com/health/call-for-drug-addicts-to-be-given-free-bus-passes-1-4921870>

10 <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/politics/scottish-politics/681721/dundee-takes-over-from-glasgow-as-drugs-death-capital-of-europe/>

11 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-48938509>

These images are having a negative impact on people affected by addiction. We should show more empathy for people. Using stigmatising images can cause unpleasant thoughts, memories, and can cause anger at the misrepresentation. Readers may have addiction problems themselves, whether historical or current, and may feel more vulnerable and traumatised with what they are seeing.

We recommend that journalists and editors should be more empathetic and consider their choice of image. Be responsible and careful to not use images that misrepresent the focus of the article or images that reinforce stigma.

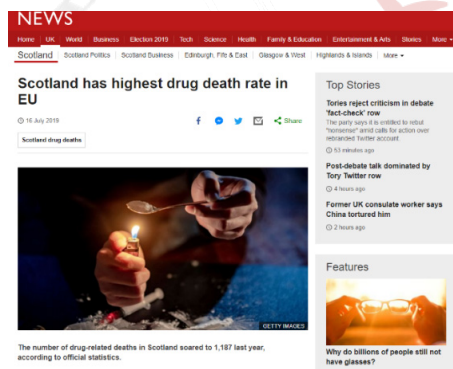


Figure 5: BBC News

Most stock images of alcohol and drugs perpetuate common beliefs of public disorder, shame, uncleanness, depravity, and fear. Images of drugs, broken bottles, paraphernalia and people in vulnerable conditions are negative and stigmatising and should be avoided.

Understand what your article is reporting and choose an image that illustrates the focus. In the table below we have given suggestions for appropriate images that can be used depending on what is being reported on.

Story	Image
Are you reporting on a personal story of someone with lived experience?	Use an image of the person if they give their permission
Is the story about methadone in a pharmacist?	Have a picture of a pharmacy or a nurse rather than bottles of methadone
Is the report about a specific city?	Use a picture of the city
Is it about a charity or an organisation that supports people with addiction problems?	Use an image of their team or their branding

Make the images more human, positive and responsible so that we can work together to stop stigma towards people with addictions.

#### 4.4.2 Showing Dignity and Respect

Although a much smaller number of articles and reports compared to the other themes, some do show dignity and respect through the story, language and imagery used. They can change the tone of an article or report to one that is more helpful and educational rather than one that is stigmatising and harmful.

**In our online survey, 100% of respondents said that people involved in the media should be more aware of the impact their work can have on an individual, their family, their community and wider society.**

STV News<sup>12</sup> released a report on the 16th of July 2019 after the Scottish drug-related death figures for 2018 were released. In the report a mother and daughter talk about the daughter's recovery and how treatment saved her life. The mother talks about how she supported her daughter, the struggles they both went through with treatment services, the circumstances around

<sup>12</sup> <https://news.stv.tv/east-central/1439282-drug-deaths-my-daughter-would-be-dead-without-treatment/?top>  
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the daughter taking drugs, and how working together alongside the treatment service ultimately saved the daughter's life.

*'Listen to family stories and realise that people in recovery are someone's child, mother, father, etc.'*

– Survey Response

It's a brilliant report because it has a real human story that is not overshadowed by stigmatising images and poor language. It focuses on a personal story that helps people understand addiction and it raises awareness of the support available.



Figure 6: STV News

*'Two photographs tell the story of Sandra's daughter Elaine, and her journey towards recovery.'*

*The first photograph breaks her mother's heart. It shows Elaine very thin in the grip of her heroin addiction.*

*In the second, taken today, Sandra is proudly standing by her daughter's side as she prepares to leave treatment after three months.'* – Sharon Frew, STV News



Figure 7: The National

Another positive article was from The National<sup>13</sup> (published 09/09/2018) which covered the *Let Us Not Forget* event in George Square, Glasgow. Caroline (pictured left) gave a talk at the *Let Us Not Forget* event supported by the Scottish Recovery Consortium that took place in Glasgow 2018. This was a public event to commemorate the 2,849 lives lost to alcohol, drugs and suicide, but the image used in this article stayed away from a stigmatising image and instead focused on participants and the striking visual of the 2,849 forget-me-nots that were created for the day for each life lost.

*'Caroline Butler, a retired nurse from Aberdeenshire, whose son Kevin died of a heroin overdose 17 years ago, said: "I don't know why we treat people who are addicted to drugs as criminals. How that helps I have yet to hear. Because of [my son's] habit he ended up stealing and was then in prison. Once in the prison system he found himself deeper into criminal life."'* - Karin Goodwin, The National

We understand that alcohol and drug addiction can be a difficult subject to report on. We lose people, families and friends grieve, lives could be saved, and people are being treated poorly and need support. Showing dignity and respect in your reporting can challenge the stigma that is experienced by people with addiction problems. It respects people's lives and offers a helping hand. It can give people dignity, rather than succumbing to harmful labels and stereotypes which have an impact on how they view themselves, and how they are viewed by others.

Dignity and respect aren't just about using more positive language and images. This also involves focusing on the most important parts of the story, such as how a person's journey into recovery could save more people rather than a story about politicians fighting over drug laws. An article

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.thenational.scot/news/16729299.families-of-addicts-plea-for-changes-to-scotlands-drug-policy/>

about pathways into recovery and how to contact local treatment and support services is more respectful and impactful than reporting on people's vulnerabilities.

Reporting with dignity and respect is just a small action, but this makes it more human. Using a human perspective when reporting on a person's story helps readers understand why people may use alcohol and drugs. When a journalist sits with people, understands their story and their thoughts, and gets to know them better, they develop a relationship and understanding. This makes the final written article a humane piece that is helpful and raises awareness of the reality of addiction, recovery, and the impact on families.

***'We need to create a safe space for many people in recovery who have a positive message to share. [The] Present environment does not give them that opportunity thus reducing visibility of what people in recovery are offering in our communities, businesses and public life.'***

- Survey Response

#### 4.4.3 'Horror' Language

The lurid use of 'horror-style' language in news articles and reports about alcohol and drugs has been around for a few years now, particularly when reporting on the synthetic cannabinoid Spice. The article from The Independent<sup>14</sup> [to the right] is an example of a lurid headline and image that creates unnecessary negative stereotypes.

The dramatic headline '*Outcry over drug abuse after photo shows 'spice zombies' slumped on bench in town centre*' is followed by a disturbing image of people in vulnerable conditions after reportedly using the synthetic cannabinoid Spice. The headline and image immediately frame the article to give the narrative of horror and fear, rather than going further into the complexity of the situation, including understanding why people use these substances and discussing how they can be supported and cared for.

#### **Outcry over drug abuse after photo shows 'spice zombies' slumped on bench in town centre**

Police say fighting substance use is a 'priority' amid fears of endemic sweeping Britain

Staff Reporter | Saturday 16 June 2018 15:48 | 46 comments



The image of alleged spice users has been shared almost 2,000 times on social media (Media Wales)

Figure 8: The Independent

***'The media causes so much damage and stigmatises people affected by addiction. More focus should be put on understanding how people recover, sharing the learning and celebrating recovery.'***

- Survey Response

'Horror' language is currently used in two different ways in the media. There is language that has an alarming quality such as 'outcry' and 'fear', and there is language you would find in the horror genre such as 'zombie' and 'endemic' which has a tone of labelling people as not being human. This then causes fear and alienation in society, which leads to further stereotypes and rejection.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/outcry-drug-abuse-photo-spice-zombies-slumped-bench-bridgend-a8402266.html>



*'Fears of endemic sweeping Britain'*

*'Slumped in a zombie-like trance'*

*'Prompted fears'*

*'Leave users in a catatonic state for hours'*

*'Growing concerns that the use of spice in Britain is turning into an epidemic'*

*'The latest picture was eliciting horrified reactions online'*

This language encourages readers to fear drugs and to fear people who have taken Spice. The article does not have personal stories which will help people understand the situation better, nor does it educate on the circumstances around why people may be taking Spice.

We recommend that this language is not used when reporting on addiction and should be avoided.

***'The media seems mostly to use blame and criticism of individuals caught in addiction, rather than showing compassion and understanding. This feeds hate and blame into the wider community.'***

– Survey Response

#### **4.4.4 Education**

In the National Union of Journalists 'Responsible Reporting on Mental Health, Mental Illness and Death by Suicide' Guidelines it is not considered good practice to discuss methods or provide information that may inform an individual of how they could hurt themselves. This practice does not extend to how substance use is discussed in the media, with images of substances being used, the paraphernalia required, how to obtain substances, and even their price included in articles and reports.

***'Drugs are a public health issue. So is suicide and it's been shown that the way suicide is treated in the press was previously harmful.'***

- Survey Response

As suggested by the findings from this project, there is a lack of understanding of the wider impact that these articles and reports can have, not only on those suffering from addiction and the consequences of it but also on their friends, family and wider society.

**100% of people consulted said they felt that journalists should have more awareness and understanding of the impact an article can have on everyone affected by addiction.**

Where potentially harmful information is frequently included in articles about drugs and alcohol, useful support information is rarely provided.



## 97% of survey participants suggested that signposting to support and services should be included in articles that are discussing addiction and recovery.

This information should include support for people seeking to get into treatment, support and recovery, as well as friends and family needing support and advice in their own right.

Signposting is increasingly common in articles relating to mental health and is commonly included in television and other media, including news relating to a wider variety of topics such as race, gender, identity and being a victim of abuse and other crimes. We have included a list of organisations that provide support under the recommendations in this report.

If you discuss addiction and recovery from a health perspective and provide information about support and services, use language to describe the people in the article in a respectful way, share information on the impact of addiction on individuals and avoid using potentially harmful images, then this can contribute to changing society's attitudes and help to make a positive change in the lives of those impacted by addiction.

*If you are experiencing feelings of distress and isolation, or are struggling to cope, **The Samaritans** offers support; you can speak to someone for free over the phone, in confidence, on 116 123 (UK and ROI), email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org), or visit the Samaritans website to find details of your nearest branch.*

*For services local to you, the national mental health database – **Hub of Hope** – allows you to enter your postcode to search for organisations and charities who offer mental health advice and support in your area.*

Figure 9: The Independent

***‘Recovery is possible at the end of each article.’***

- Survey Response

***‘Spend time within recovery communities, get to know the people not the problems.’***

- Survey Response

We recommend that journalists and editors should take the time to engage with individuals impacted by addiction, including families, people in recovery and people in active addiction. This will increase their awareness and understanding, and ensure people are represented in a way they feel better reflects their lives.

***‘By researching and educating themselves on the underlying factors contributing to addiction, but taking a more asset-based, compassionate perspective. By consulting with individuals and families in recovery.’***

- Survey Response

### 4.4.5 Stigma

In the *Cambridge Dictionary*, stigma is defined as ‘a strong lack of respect for a person or a group of people or a bad opinion of them because they have done something society does not approve of.’<sup>15</sup>

A concerning number of news articles and reports are stigmatising – for example through the

<sup>15</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/stigma>

language, images, story, or the platform provided for the opinions of politicians, individuals, etc. Stigma unfairly portrays people suffering from addiction or in recovery in a negative light, but also has the potential to cause further harm. Stigma surrounding these issues can prevent people reaching out or seeking help.

***‘Users are stigmatised, no media coverage about recovery.’***

- Survey Response

Recovery from addiction should be highlighted more in the media to show that recovery is possible. This not only acts as a potential source of inspiration for someone who may be thinking about taking steps towards recovery, but also shows that people can and do recover from addiction. This is vital to contribute to changing the public perception of this vulnerable group in society, but also encourages people to be more compassionate towards others in our communities.

***‘It’s written in a way to cause a negative reaction and create an outcry with those reading it.’***

- Survey Response

There is little acknowledgement shown in many of the news articles and reports researched of the difference between someone suffering from addiction and someone in recovery. Recovery is a positive change in someone’s life and the language used should reflect this. Experiencing addiction should be treated with the same sensitivity shown to those suffering from any other chronic, long-term, physical or mental health issue.

Many of the online survey participants said that even where the information in articles was factually correct, it was presented in a sensationalist manner that at times became ‘*stigmatising*’ and at worst ‘*dehumanising*.’

It is also important that the media does not promote or encourage exploitation of some of the most vulnerable members of society, as this can cause potential harm and further stigma from the general public.

For example, in 2019 ITV News<sup>16</sup> broadcast this report where they interviewed a woman who was extremely vulnerable and distressed. In our view this was inappropriate for the individual involved.

*‘One addict told ITV News she has no intention of quitting despite losing six friends in the past three weeks.’*

*Paula Clare says she gets “unbearable pains” in her stomach and feels sick when she doesn’t use them.*



Figure 10: ITV News

*“You see when you don’t have them, you can’t look anyone in the eye... there’s something in them that’s different from normal Valium,” Paula said.*

*“You’ve got to get them or you can’t function right.”*

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-06-27/drugs-now-bigger-killer-than-alcohol-in-scotland-with-deadly-pill-costing-less-than-mars-bar/>



***‘Continual negative images or wording in otherwise positive coverage.’***

- Survey Response

Our research found concerns about the lack of consultation taking place and suggests that journalists and editors should be asking people affected by addiction to advise on the most appropriate language to use.

#### **4.4.6 Political Debates**

Due to the high (and increasing) level of drug-related deaths in Scotland there is significant media interest in the issue, and in the government response.

Consequently, the issue of drug-related deaths in Scotland can be reported as a *‘political football’*, rather than taking the time to fully explore issues and identify solutions with those most affected.

#### **The Scotsman 2019<sup>17</sup>**

*Opposition MSPs have slated the Scottish Government for reducing funding for alcohol and drug partnerships while fatal overdoses increased.*

*Labour and the Liberal Democrats called on ministers to take responsibility for the “horrible” NRS figures.*

#### **BBC News 2019<sup>18</sup>**

*The Scottish Conservatives said the SNP has had sole control over Scotland’s health and justice systems for 12 years but has “only worsened the drugs crisis” in that time.*

It is vital that people in political and media positions use the recommended terminology and tone in their coverage of this issue. It is also vital that they talk and consult people with lived and living experience and people who work in the sector to have factually correct information and statistics.

***‘Speak to people involved not just politicians.’***

- Survey Response

Opinions and/or statements from politicians should be supported with the lived experience of those involved.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.scotsman.com/regions/glasgow-and-strathclyde/national-crisis-drug-related-deaths-scotland-high-est-ever-level-1413147>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-48938509>

## 5. Conclusion

The current portrayal of addiction and recovery in the media is generally negative, and the repeated use of stigmatising images and language is a regular feature in Scotland's media.

While there have been very recent improvements (and there are always exceptions including some excellent journalists and editors who do their best to report fairly and positively), there is still a long way to go in changing the portrayal of addiction and recovery in the media.

Our communities of family members, individuals, and people in recovery told us in our online survey and workshop that the media seem unaware of the impact their coverage has on individuals and communities. But there were also messages about how the media plays a vital role in helping to celebrate recovery and to help people reach out for support.

***‘The media causes so much damage and stigmatises people affected by addiction. More focus should be put on understanding how people recover, sharing the learning and celebrating recovery.’***

- Survey Response

With just a few changes, journalists and editors could have a positive impact - by not using stigmatising images and language, by including support information, and by sharing lived and living experience.

### **Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery: Six Recommendations for Journalists and Editors**

1. Use positive imagery
2. Adopt People-First language
3. Use your article as an opportunity to educate
4. Always include support service information
5. Learn about lived experience and the impact of stigma
6. Include more positive stories reflecting recovery, support, and lived/living experiences

## Appendix 1: Articles and Reports for Thematic Analysis

Themes	Outlet	Title	Date	Link
Dignity & respect	STV News	Drug deaths: trauma of the grieving families left behind	15/08/2017	<a href="https://bit.ly/2AIVMJe">https://bit.ly/2AIVMJe</a>
Educating Stigma	BBC News	MSP Monica Lennon didn't invite alcoholic father to wedding	26/10/2017	<a href="https://bbc.in/2Zjgslp">https://bbc.in/2Zjgslp</a>
Educating Stigma	BBC News	The drug cop and the addict in recovery	21/05/2018	<a href="https://bbc.in/2WJh1D4">https://bbc.in/2WJh1D4</a>
'Horror' language Stigma	The Independent	Outcry over drug abuse after photo shows 'spice zombies'...	16/06/2018	<a href="https://bit.ly/3g25fvj">https://bit.ly/3g25fvj</a>
Political debates Stigmatising images	The Courier	Dundee takes over from Glasgow as drugs death capital...	04/07/2018	<a href="https://bit.ly/2zWb8cL">https://bit.ly/2zWb8cL</a>
Dignity & respect	BBC News	My nephew Graham was more than a drug death statistic	15/08/2018	<a href="https://bbc.in/2WOwG4p">https://bbc.in/2WOwG4p</a>
Dignity & respect Stigma	The National	Families of addicts plea for changes to Scotland's drug policy	09/09/2018	<a href="https://bit.ly/3dXW3Gv">https://bit.ly/3dXW3Gv</a>
Stigmatising images Stigma	Daily Mail	Two convicts seen openly sniffing 'drugs' from a table...	01/05/2019	<a href="http://dailym.ai/2Zhcfyn">http://dailym.ai/2Zhcfyn</a>
Educating	Evening Standard	Male Mental Health: why we need to talk about the boys	02/05/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/36hDkD5">https://bit.ly/36hDkD5</a>
Educating	Daily Record	It's time to decriminalise drugs in Scotland for personal use...	02/05/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/3g3H3sy">https://bit.ly/3g3H3sy</a>
Educating	Daily Record	Radical new approach needed to get Scots drug users...	06/05/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/3cJu6Cc">https://bit.ly/3cJu6Cc</a>
Stigmatising images Political debates	The Scotsman	Call for drug addicts to be given free bus passes	07/05/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/3bL1B5B">https://bit.ly/3bL1B5B</a>

Educating Stigmatising images	Daily Record	Scotland on the brink of becoming the drug death capital...	15/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/36dMfp0">https://bit.ly/36dMfp0</a>
Political debates	STV News	Drug death rate in Scotland 'highest in European Union'	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2TIOQII">https://bit.ly/2TIOQII</a>
Stigmatising images Political debates Educating	The Guardian	Scotland records huge rise in drug-related deaths	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/3g3mV9L">https://bit.ly/3g3mV9L</a>
Educating	BBC News	I lost my mum, dad, two sisters and brother to drugs	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bbc.in/3g5Rj3y">https://bbc.in/3g5Rj3y</a>
Stigmatising images Political debates	ITV News	Scotland sees highest number of drugs deaths in EU with...	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2TfsqZp">https://bit.ly/2TfsqZp</a>
Educating	ITV News	Scotland in grip of drugs crisis as more than 1,000 die...	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2ThUsmP">https://bit.ly/2ThUsmP</a>
Political debates Stigmatising images	The Scotsman	A national crisis: drug- related deaths in Scotland at highest...	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2WHGZa6">https://bit.ly/2WHGZa6</a>
Stigmatising images Political debates	The Courier	Scotland has highest rate of drug deaths in Europe	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2TkiNsd">https://bit.ly/2TkiNsd</a>
Political debates Stigmatising images	BBC News	Scotland has highest drug death rate in EU	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bbc.in/3cMUxGW">https://bbc.in/3cMUxGW</a>
Stigmatising images Educating	The Conversation	Record drug deaths in Scotland....	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2LJk6gq">https://bit.ly/2LJk6gq</a>
Dignity & respect	STV News	My daughter would be dead without treatment	16/07/2019	<a href="https://bit.ly/2TiWDeE">https://bit.ly/2TiWDeE</a>

## Appendix 2: Online Survey Results

We have not included all of the survey responses here. If you wish to see the full survey results you can email [rebecca@sfad.org.uk](mailto:rebecca@sfad.org.uk) or [danielle@scottishrecoveryconsortium.org](mailto:danielle@scottishrecoveryconsortium.org) for the PDF copy.

### Summary of key stats:

- 98% of responses said that they didn't think alcohol and drug issues were reported in the media in the right way
- 80% of responses said that an image showing a needle in a street was harmful to people in recovery
- An image of heroin paraphernalia was considered the most stigmatising image
- 80% of responses said that headlines including the word 'addicts' were harmful to people in recovery
- 100% of responses said that people involved in the media should be more aware of the impact their work can have on an individual, their family, their community and wider society
- 98% of responses said all articles discussing alcohol, drug and other addictions should include information on support
- 100% of responses agree that there should be guidelines for discussing addiction and recovery

### Headline question feedback:

*'Grim. I would not expect to read any positive statements or facts in an article with this heading.'*

*'Seems fairly standard for our news media. It's important that the public understand drug deaths are increasing, but it doesn't have a positive impact.'*

*'Factually correct, but sensationalised.'*

*'It's honesty, however the language could be better picked.'*

*'Poor judgement. I feel that it is not promoting a positive message about people in recovery (at any stage)'*

*'Very discriminatory, 'addicts' as distinct to 'normal people'*

*'It encourages the public to view those with addiction issues as getting things for free and promotes division and bad feeling'*

*'Often a negative view of addicts and not enough focus on those who have changed and the reasons as to why people often use substances problematically'*

### What should media include question feedback:

*'More promotion of what is available for people in the communities, more positive support for people living with addiction including families and communities.'*



*'We need to create a safe space for many people in recovery who have a positive message to share. Present environment does not give them that opportunity thus reducing visibility of what people in recovery are offering in our communities, businesses and public life.'*

*'It would be great if the media would report about the people that has overcome their addiction problems.'*

*'Person-first language should be adopted, not labelling people as 'addicts', 'alcoholics', 'junkies', etc.'*

*'The media causes so much damage and stigmatises people affected by addiction. More focus should be put on understanding how people recover, sharing the learning and celebrating recovery.'*

*'Not all is negative but great strides need to be done to make it acceptable.'*

### **Image question feedback:**

*'Unnecessary'*

*'Risky'*

*'Untidy, messy, dangerous'*

*'Cliché, old fashioned'*

*'...young people should be protected from such images on the internet and media'*

*'Sensationalist'*

*'Despair and embarrassment'*

*'Shame'*

*'Hopelessness'*

### **How should people involved in the media gain a better understanding of the impact articles can have on people in recovery, their family, their community, and wider society?:**

*'Journalists should be better educated on stigma and learn how to use terms which are not going to further damage public opinion.'*

*'Having more of an understanding of what addiction really means and the impact on an individual's behaviour.'*

*'The media need to not report what they think people want to hear but what they need to hear (funnily enough it may be a more positive message. There needs to be a cultural shift that media has a part in influencing.'*

*'Become trauma informed.'*

*'Listen to family stories and realise that people in recovery are someone's child, mother, father, etc.'*



*‘...they need to see what their articles do to not only the victims of their stories but the friends and families of the victims.’*

*‘However slowly but surely with the recovery movement gaining traction hopefully more positive stories will be out there also the public will see that we can recovery.’*

### **Collection of other quotes:**

*‘The majority of reporting is very negative in its format and does not give a great deal of focus on recovery’*

*‘Swings between a positive messages of social wellbeing to a negative presentation of harm. No promotion of recovery. Self-blames [the] individual.’*

*‘Alcohol is portrayed as a normal and expected thing to do, impact on individuals and families are ignored.’*

*‘Continual negative images or working in otherwise positive coverage.’*

*‘Always made more dramatic and sensationalised.’*

*‘The media seems mostly to use blame and criticism of individuals caught in addiction, rather than showing compassion and understanding. This feeds hate and blame into the wider community.’*

## Appendix 3: Workshop Findings

### Scotland on the brink of becoming the drug death capital of the world as grim figures soar

Killer overdoses could be more common in Scotland than that of the deadly opioids crisis in America as figures for 2018 will be released tomorrow.



Scotland is on the brink of being declared the worst **drug death** country in the developed world. Official statistics to be released tomorrow are expected to show more people **die from overdoses** than even America, where killer fentanyl and other deadly opioids have run rife in recent years. Scotland would equal that mark if the National Records of Scotland data of **drug deaths** hits 1180 deaths for the latest recorded year.

Scotland's public health minister Joe FitzPatrick last week told the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster that he fears the tally could be as high as 1200. That **horrendous** total would mark an increase of almost 30 per cent – a **barely believable** jump for a nation that is already, by miles, the worst drugs nation in Europe.

Scotland's biggest challenge is tackling the polydrug habits that see many long-term addicts mix heroin and methadone with alcohol, prescription pills and street drugs that are often manufactured by criminal gangs in makeshift Scottish drugs factories by

the million. Campaigner Martin Powell, of Transform, which seeks to decriminalise drugs, said it is astonishing that Scotland's death toll could overtake that of the US, given the way fentanyl has dramatically driven their numbers upwards. He said: "The US is suffering a drug death crisis – driven by opioids including fentanyl – that has made headlines around the world, and caused political uproar for its severity.

"And rightly so, as 70,000 drug deaths a year is a catastrophe.

"It means that for every 100,000 Americans, 21.7 died from drugs in 2017.

"That is the highest drug death rate in the developed world, where the numbers are counted, and possibly anywhere.

"And yet, right here in Scotland, when the number of drug deaths for 2018 is announced, if they have passed the 1180 mark, it will mean this country has beaten that US drug death rate.

"Over 21.7 Scots will have died from drugs per 100,000 of our population.

"And given last week Drugs Minister Joe FitzPatrick said as many as 1200 may have died, that is a very real possibility.

"Last year, Scotland reconfirmed its position as the drug death capital of Europe.

*- makes it sound positive?!*

"Tomorrow, it could take the darkest of crowns as the drug death capital of the developed world."

Powell said the UK Government must take heed of the extent of this emergency, which has been highlighted during a Daily Record campaign in recent months. He said: "This cannot be allowed to stand. All politicians must stop playing politics with people's lives.

"This shameful and entirely avoidable crisis demands that the UK Government calls it what it is – a public health emergency.

*- what we do to avoid then?*

"And the Scottish Government must implement emergency measures, while developing a long-term strategy.

"If drug deaths can more than double in five years, that strategy should aim to at least halve them in the same time.

"But politicians must act now, as I am hearing from people on the ground that already this year, things are worse than 2018.

"The Record has written extensively about Drug Consumption Rooms and Portuguese style decriminalisation.

"That is what we must be talking about on a UK level and a pilot scheme in Glasgow would be a very appropriate trial for such schemes."

America's opioid epidemic has driven total drug overdose deaths to record numbers – with overdose deaths hitting 70,000 in 2017 – that tally amounted to more lives claimed by guns, car crashes, or HIV/AIDS in any single year in US history. The US opioid crisis took off in the country in the late 1990s – as pharmaceutical marketing and lobbying led doctors to prescribe far more opioid painkillers, and misuse and addiction rose. A second wave of drug overdoses began in the 2000s when heroin flooded the illicit market, as drug dealers took advantage of a new population of people who used opioids but either lost access to painkillers or simply sought a better, cheaper high.

Then came a third wave of overdoses, as illicit fentanyl, a synthetic opioid, started to supplant heroin in the black market. Overdose rates went through the roof, as fentanyls are generally more potent than heroin or other traditionally opioids.

The extent of Scotland's drugs crisis has tended to go under the radar in international league tables as our deaths are measured as part of the UK as a whole. But Scotland's death rate is heading towards being three times as bad as the rest of the UK's.



## Scotland in grip of drugs crisis as more than 1,000 die every year with deadly pills costing less than Mars bar

More than 1,000 people have died from drugs in one year in Scotland for the first time – and the crisis is seemingly fuelled by a pill sold for less than a chocolate bar.

ITV News understands statistics set to be published next month will show drug deaths in the country have hit a record high.

While figures from England and Wales have stabilised in recent years, drug deaths have doubled in the past decade in Scotland and are accelerating.

In almost two thirds of these deaths, the sedative benzodiazepine was found in the bloodstream.

These so-called "Street Valiums" can be bought for just 30p per pill, even somewhere as crowded and busy as central Glasgow during rush hour.

The crisis also raises questions over Scotland's treatment of addicts as almost half the people who died in Scotland's drug capital Dundee had methadone in the bloodstream.

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The National Records of Scotland reports there were 934 drug-related deaths in 2017, which is an increase of 66 (8%) from 2016.

This was the largest number ever recorded, and 479 (105%) higher than the figure for 2007, which was 455. **!!**

To put this into context, in England and Wales there were 66.1 drug-poisoning deaths per million in the population in 2017.

There were 140 in Scotland on average between 2013 and 2017.

One addict told ITV News she has no intention of quitting despite losing six friends in the past three weeks.

Paula Clare says she gets "unbearable pains" in her stomach and feels sick when she doesn't use them.

"You see when you don't have them, you can't look anyone in the eye... there's something in them that's different from normal Valium," Paula said. "You've got to get them or you can't function right."



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He promised: "If I can save one life I will do"



# Scotland [on the brink] of becoming the [drug death capital] of the world as [grim figures soar]

Killer overdoses could be more common in Scotland than that of the deadly opioids crisis in America as figures for 2018 will be released tomorrow.



Scotland is on the brink of being declared the worst **drug death** country in the **developed world**. Official statistics to be released tomorrow are expected to show more people **die from overdoses** than even America, where killer fentanyl and other deadly opioids have run rife in recent years. Scotland would equal that mark if the National Records of Scotland data of **drug deaths** hits 1180 deaths for the latest recorded year.

Scotland's public health minister Joe FitzPatrick last week told the Scottish Affairs Committee at Westminster that he fears the tally could be as high as 1200. That horrendous total would mark an increase of almost 30 per cent – a barely believable jump for a nation that is already, by miles, the worst drugs nation in Europe.

(Scotland's biggest challenge is tackling the polydrug habits that see many long-term addicts mix heroin and methadone with alcohol, prescription pills and street drugs that are often manufactured by criminal gangs in makeshift Scottish drugs factories by

the million. Campaigner Martin Powell, of Transform, which seeks to decriminalise drugs, said it is astonishing that Scotland's death toll could overtake that of the US, given the way fentanyl has dramatically driven their numbers upwards. He said: "The US is suffering a drug death crisis – driven by opioids including fentanyl – that has made headlines around the world, and caused political uproar for its severity.

"And rightly so, as 70,000 drug deaths a year is a catastrophe.

"It means that for every 100,000 Americans, 21.7 died from drugs in 2017.

"That is the highest drug death rate in the developed world, where the numbers are counted, and possibly anywhere.

"And yet, right here in Scotland, when the number of drug deaths for 2018 is announced, if they have passed the 1180 mark, it will mean this country has beaten that US drug death rate.

"Over 21.7 Scots will have died from drugs per 100,000 of our population.

"And given last week Drugs Minister Joe FitzPatrick said as many as 1200 may have died, that is a very real possibility.

"Last year, Scotland reconfirmed its position as the drug death capital of Europe.

"Tomorrow, [it could take the darkest of crowns] as the drug death capital of the developed world."

Powell said the UK Government must take heed of the extent of this emergency, which has been highlighted during a Daily Record campaign in recent months. He said: "This cannot be allowed to stand. All politicians must stop playing politics with people's lives.

(This shameful and entirely avoidable crisis demands that the UK Government calls it what it is – a public health emergency.)

"And the Scottish Government must implement emergency measures, while developing a long-term strategy.

"If drug deaths can more than double in five years, that strategy should aim to at least halve them in the same time.

"But politicians must act now, as I am hearing from people on the ground that already this year, things are worse than 2018.

"The Record has written extensively about Drug Consumption Rooms and Portuguese style decriminalisation.

"That is what we must be talking about on a UK level and a pilot scheme in Glasgow would be a very appropriate trial for such schemes."

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~ speak to people !!

why?  
sigma.

why is  
America in  
this story?

- is deams a compenai?

- glorifying language

Speak to  
people with lived  
experience

this should be  
the headline

why does this matter?

# Call for drug addicts to be given free bus passes

Published: 06:00 Tuesday 07 May 2019 Updated: 14:29 Wednesday 15 May 2019

**Giving people with drug addictions free bus passes would encourage them to undergo treatment, it has been claimed.**

MPs on the Scottish affairs committee at Westminster will today begin an inquiry into drug abuse in Scotland, where the rate of substance-related deaths is higher than anywhere in western Europe.

Drug workers in the North-east said a pilot in Aberdeenshire – during which drug users were given concessionary travel – dramatically increased attendance at healthcare appointments and should be rolled out across the country.

The number of drug fatalities in Scotland is expected to reach the 1,000 mark this year, with the rate of death two-and-a-half times that of the UK as a whole and 50 times that of Portugal, which decriminalised possession and consumption in 2001.



Free bus travel in Scotland is currently provided for those with disabilities and people with long-term mental health problems.

Wayne Gault, of the Aberdeenshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership, said that during a 2015 pilot scheme, there was a three-fold reduction in the number of people failing to attend clinic appointments.

He said: "Addiction, whether it's drugs or alcohol, is first and foremost a healthcare condition. It's a condition like any other healthcare condition, and reasonable people would expect the state to do whatever it can to support people to recover.

"Even the use of the language 'drug addicts' implies some sort of stigmatising attitude about worthiness or deservedness. In actual fact, if people are keen to engage with services, keen to recover from their affliction, then why wouldn't we do everything we can to support them, especially if it benefits the taxpayer in the long run."

In a series of submissions to the Scottish affairs committee published at the weekend, charities and drug treatment services called for drug legislation to be devolved to Holyrood to tackle the growing crisis. They called for radical interventions, including decriminalisation, and a move away from what they call Westminster's "just say no" message.

Annie Wells, Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman, said: "The SNP has wholly failed to tackle Scotland's worrying track record on drug addiction.

"Ensuring addicts can get to appointments is important but it is far more important that they are given the means to break their habit. With Scotland's drug deaths due to be over 1,000 this year, the SNP has to make far greater effort to tackle this problem."

nothing about what effect decriminalisation had?



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WHY POLITICAL POINT SCORING

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27 June 2019 at 6:15pm

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~ should this lady have been interviewed? vulnerable person

this is important and should be at the top



# Outcry over drug abuse after photo shows 'spice zombies' slumped on bench in town centre

Police say fighting substance use is a 'priority' amid fears of endemic sweeping Britain

- **Staff Reporter**
- Saturday 16 June 2018 15:48
- 46 comments



A widely-shared photo showing three men slumped in a zombie-like trance in a Welsh town centre has prompted fears that use of the drug spice is getting out of control in parts of Britain.

The image – taken in Bridgend – shows the trio sprawled on and around a bench. One is semi-naked.

All three appear to have taken the psychoactive substance, which can leave users in a catatonic state for hours at a time.

The picture – taken on Tuesday afternoon – has been shared almost 2,000 times on social media. A second later emerged showing a fourth man unconscious on another town bench.

The person who took it but asked not to be named told walesonline.co.uk: "It's terrible.. (There was kids in the background and walking past.)"

It appears to add to growing concerns that use of spice in Britain is turning into an epidemic. Similar photos from Manchester, Liverpool, Blackpool, Wolverhampton, London and Cambridge have all been shared in the past. In March, a 14-year-old died in Stockport after taking the drug. Just last month, health officials warned that abuse of the drug in prisons was creating a health crisis.

As the latest picture was eliciting horrified reactions online, South Wales Police moved to reassure residents that fighting the drug was a priority.

Detective Inspector Dean Taylor said the force was aware of the photo.

"Tackling the illegal drug supply on our streets is a priority for us as this kind of criminal activity has a hugely detrimental impact on our communities," he said.

He added: "We recently held Operation Pacific in the town centre which targeted county lines and the supply of drugs. This led to a number of arrests.

"The number of incidents of spice use reported to us remains very low. I would encourage anyone with concerns relating to drug supply including spice to contact us.

"I would ask that that the community continue to work with us and make a stand against the drug dealers who impose this misery upon others."

- This is decent, it shows an action & not 'blaming' the person using drugs

- worst stigmatising language ever

- It's not a horror film, use better language

- shaming

- 'getting' out of control?

- shaming.

- why? who would take a photo like this?



STIGMA

- because we are to fear these people?

no other? nervous?

SHAMING

SHAMING

SHAMING

People in recovery given support to travel to appointments

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it is fact

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HIGHLIGHT THIS

doesn't fit in with the story

This is positive so why is the image and headline negative

unnecessary political input



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*- what's being done?*

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*- are people not priority?*

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# INSERT STANDARD STIGMATISING HEADLINE & IMAGE HERE

Rewriting the Media's Portrayal of Addiction and Recovery



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Families**

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

**Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs**

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Facebook: [@ScottishFamiliesAffectedByDrugs](https://facebook.com/ScottishFamiliesAffectedByDrugs)

Instagram: [@ScotFamADrugs](https://instagram.com/ScotFamADrugs)

Registered Scottish Charity: SC034737



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