

# Public Engagement: And why PhD students should do it!

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@soozaphone

# Outline

- My story
- Types of public engagement
- Why do public engagement?
- Top tips for blogging and podcasting

# My story



## Sifting The Evidence

Trawling through the world of science for prize stories of note

Wednesday, 16 May 2012

### Is exposure to angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors related to Alzheimer's disease?

Posted by [Neil Davies](#)

(first published on [Nature Network](#) May 11th)

One of the questions I have been investigating is whether a type of anti-hypertensive drug, angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors, may inadvertently cause some people to develop Alzheimer's disease.

Healthy Brain    Severe AD

#### Recent Posts

[Is exposure to angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors related to Alzheimer's disease?](#)

[Who are the Children of the 90s?](#)

[Alcohol: 'more harmful than heroin', or all in the mind?](#)

[Mendelian Randomisation and the Prevention of Spurious Findings](#)

[Geek Like Me?](#)

[Why we should be wary of the tobacco companies](#)

[Ding Ding All Change](#)

[First Class Mutations](#)

# My story

- Blog moved to Nature Network
- Then to Scilogs.com



# My story

- Won 2012 UK Science Blog Prize
- Moved to theguardian.com

theguardian

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[News](#) > [Science](#) > [Sifting the evidence](#) > [Brain flapping](#) | [Neurophilosophy](#) | [The Lay Scienti](#)

## SIFTING THE EVIDENCE

BY SUZI GAGE  
HOSTED BY THE GUARDIAN

 RSS



Monday 19 August 2013

### Can drinking too much coffee kill you?

Posted by  
Suzi Gage  
14.03 BST



# My story

- I'm a Scientist Get Me Out of Here
- Scroobius Pip's Distraction Pieces
- Not iust the usual 'science communication'?



I'm a  
**Scientist**  
Get me **OUT** of here



# My story



## Bringing science to the masses



Staff and students from the Institute have taken part in the Green Man Festival in the Brecon Beacons, Wales as part of their latest public engagement initiative.

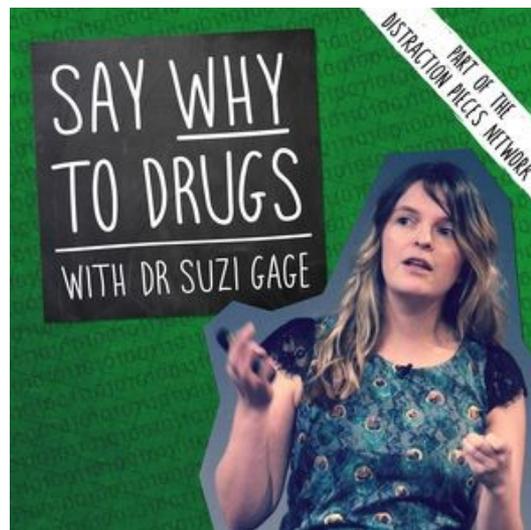
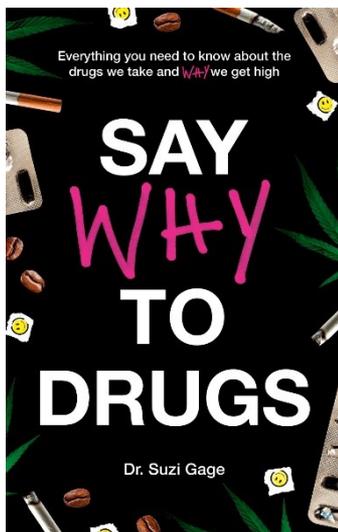
# My story

Stimulate discussion around scientific method via the lens of recreational drugs

Work with underserved audiences – cannabis clubs

Expand the reach of my work – book

Evaluate the impact of my outreach



# Types of Public Engagement

(a non-exhaustive list)

- Writing – books, articles, podcasts, tweets
- Broadcasting – radio, TV, podcasts, vlogs, youtube
- Outreach – stalls, public talks, workshops
- PPI (personal and public involvement) – working with the individuals who are also the subject of your research
- Citizen science – harnessing enthusiastic lay-people to collect/interpret data

# Things to consider

- What's the purpose of your engagement – tell, ask, discuss, decide
- Where in your research activity are you – beginning (input in design of a study), middle (an insight in to the research process), end (dissemination of findings/impact)
- Your particular research study, or bigger picture information/discussion

# Why should PhD students blog?

(or podcast, or do any other activity really)

# Why? 2 way communication

## 6 Responses to "Tobacco Control, Plain Packaging, and Media Misinformation"

Neil Davies  
6 May 2012 2:33pm  
[Reply](#) | [Permalink](#)

## Sifting the evidence



## Can drinking too much coffee kill you?

19 Aug 2013, 14:03 BST:

**Suzi Gage:** A new study reports that excessive coffee – four cups a day – is harmful, but only to those under 55. How likely is this?

 436 comments

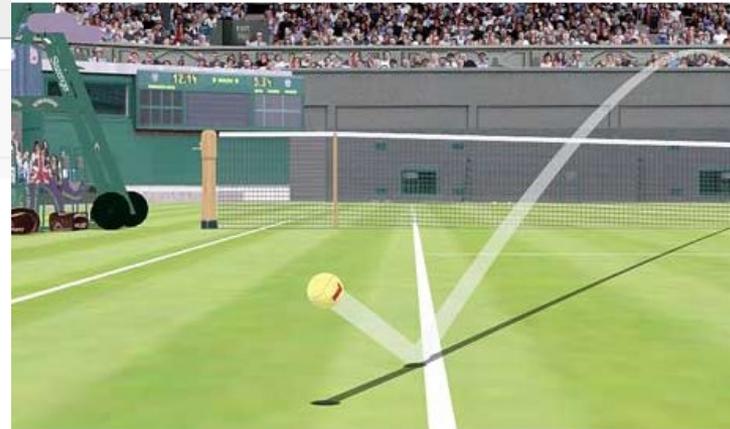
## 31 Responses to "Perspective on cannabis dependence and IQ"

Alex Stevens  
29 August 2012 2:04pm  
[Reply](#) | [Permalink](#)

Interesting post. What did you think of the claimed linear dose-response relationship in table 2?

## Hawk-Eye at Wimbledon: it's not as infallible as you think

Posted by  
Suzi Gage  
08.59 BST



Because of uncertainty over the trajectory of a fast-moving ball between film frames, Hawk-Eye will always be fallible. Photograph: public domain

**Suzi Gage:** Hawk-Eye was frequently called upon at Wimbledon, and will no doubt feature in the Ashes, but how accurate is it?

# Why?

- You're the boss (but you can ask for help)
  - Send posts to supervisor/mentor
  - Now he sends his posts to me!

# Why? Immediacy, Controversy

Thursday 18 July 2013

## Cannabis psychosis admissions rose after drug reclassified to Class B

Posted by  
Suzi Gage  
17.13 BST



Home secretary Jacqui Smith cited harm to mental health as the main justification for reclassifying cannabis in 2009. Photograph: David Bebbler/Reuters

**Suzi Gage:** Study suggests home secretary's attempt to reduce cannabis-induced psychosis by upgrading the drug to Class B failed

[Continue reading...](#)

 161 comments

Wednesday 5 June 2013

## One for the road? The hidden risks of roadside alcohol availability

Posted by  
Sally Adams  
09.42 BST



JD Wetherspoon says it will open its first motorway pub after being given the go-ahead at services on the M40. Photograph: Martin Godwin for the Guardian

**Sally Adams:** As JD Wetherspoon looks set to open its first motorway service station pub, it may be time to ask where to draw the line in the sale of alcohol

[Continue reading...](#)

 230 comments

# Why? Niche posts for niche audience

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Wednesday 15 May 2013

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Psychology uses 'registered replication reports' to improve reliability

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Posted by  
Suzi Gage  
12.28 BST



The first registered replication report concerns a possible form of memory bias that could have implications for eyewitness testimony. Photograph: Alamy

**Suzi Gage:** Criticisms about lack of replications and confidence in findings has inspired researchers in the field to do something about it

[Continue reading...](#)

 5 comments

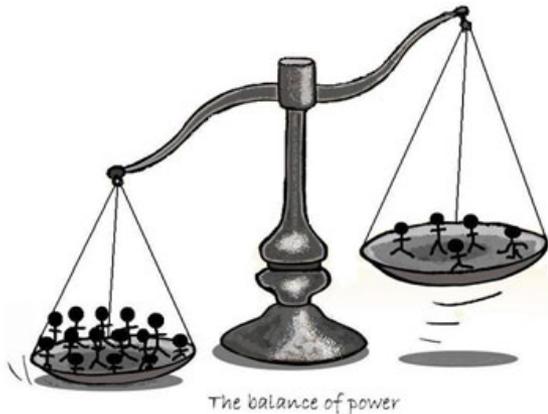
# Why? Lay summaries of research

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Wednesday 10 April 2013

## Unreliable neuroscience? Why power matters

Posted by  
Kate Button  
12.30 BST



Studies with larger sample sizes have more statistical power and can detect more subtle effects. Photograph: Kate Button

**Kate Button:** Small studies with low power undermine the reliability of neuroscience and new evidence suggests that low power is the norm in neuroscience

[Continue reading...](#)

 25 comments

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Wednesday 3 April 2013

## Smile and the world smiles back. Can looking at faces lower aggression?

Posted by  
Suzi Gage  
13.57 BST

**Suzi Gage:** I collected the data for an experiment trying to reduce anger by manipulating biases in emotional processing. I was sceptical, but the results surprised me

[Continue reading...](#)

 4 comments

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# Why? Respond to media misrepresentation

**Mail**Online



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## CITY FOCUS: Taxing times in tobacco trading

By RUPERT STEINER

PUBLISHED: 00:38, 2 May 2012 | UPDATED: 00:38, 2 May 2012

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[13](#) View comments

There are few industries to have come under such sustained attack as big tobacco. From tax hikes, smoking bans and a barrage of legislation aimed at deterring smokers from reaching for their next pack of 20, it is all-out war.

This month saw shops having to hide away cigarette packs from view to deter impulse-buying, and two weeks ago the Government launched a public consultation on the possibility of plain packaging of tobacco products.

# Why? Respond to media misrepresentation

# MailOnline



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## CITY FOCUS: Taxing times in tobacco trading

### Tobacco Control, Plain Packaging, and Media Misinformation

By RUPERT STEINER

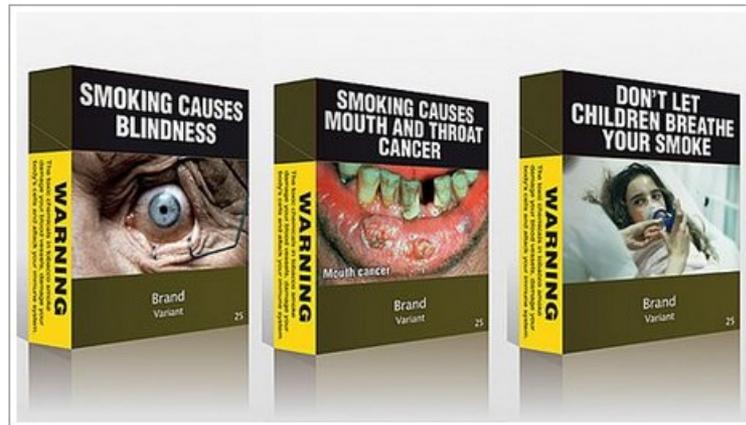
3 May 2012 by Suzi Gage, posted in Uncategorized

PUBLISHED: 00:38, 2 May 2012 | UPDATE

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There are few industries to have tobacco. From tax hikes, smoking at deterring smokers from reaching war.

This month saw shops having to deter impulse-buying, and two weeks public consultation on the possible products.



Yesterday an [article](#) in the Daily Mail was brought to my attention by Ben Goldacre, and Transform Drug Policy Foundation. There have been a few articles along a similar line to this one. questioning tobacco control research



**Suzi Gage**  
| About the blog  
| Blog homepage

Search Sifting the Evidence



#### RECENT POSTS

- Goodbye, and thank you!
- Cooking up a twitter storm. Or: What to do about the gender divide in science

# Why? Up-to-date description of your work for potential collaborators



## Memetic Drift

Home About Becky About Em About MD

**SEP 26 2013**

### Pot Luck. Does smoking cannabis really lead to psychosis? [Suzi]

*Here's the second in our intermittent series of PhD students describing their research and why it's useful / awesome. Suzi Gage, as well as doing a PhD in epidemiology, writes for her blog [Sifting the Evidence](#) which is hosted by the Guardian, runs marathons and is part of a band called [Glis glis](#). There's plenty more I could say but if you want more from her, I'd suggest her twitter [@soozaphone](#).*

Starting my PhD investigations into cannabis use and psychosis made me increasingly aware that everyone has their own explanation or interpretation of their own thoughts and experiences. As a psychologist I'm used to people having an opinion on what I do; who doesn't have an opinion on the workings of their own mind? Perhaps it's because of the illicit nature of researching an illegal substance, perhaps it's due to the devastating effects that psychosis can have on a young person, but strangers' responses to my research topic fall into two categories. Usually it's 'oh, can I be a participant?', and occasionally 'my friend smoked pot and had serious mental health problems afterwards'.

# Why? Post publication peer review

[Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A](#), 2012 Oct 2;109(40):E2657-64. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1206820109. Epub 2012 Aug 27.

## **Persistent cannabis users show neuropsychological decline from childhood to midlife.**

[Meier MH](#), [Caspi A](#), [Ambler A](#), [Harrington H](#), [Houts R](#), [Keefe RS](#), [McDonald K](#), [Ward A](#), [Poulton R](#), [Moffitt TE](#).

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708, USA. [madeline.meier@duke.edu](mailto:madeline.meier@duke.edu)

### **Abstract**

Recent reports show that fewer adolescents believe that regular cannabis use is harmful to health. Concomitantly, adolescents are initiating cannabis use at younger ages, and more adolescents are using cannabis on a daily basis. The purpose of the present study was to test the association between persistent cannabis use and neuropsychological decline and determine whether decline is concentrated among adolescent-onset cannabis users. Participants were members of the Dunedin Study, a prospective study of a birth cohort of 1,037 individuals followed from birth (1972/1973) to age 38 y. Cannabis use was ascertained in interviews at ages 18, 21, 26, 32, and 38 y. Neuropsychological testing was conducted at age 13 y, before initiation of cannabis use, and again at age 38 y, after a pattern of persistent cannabis use had developed. Persistent cannabis use was associated with neuropsychological decline broadly across domains of functioning, even after controlling for years of education. Informants also reported noticing more cognitive problems for persistent cannabis users. Impairment was concentrated among adolescent-onset cannabis users, with more persistent use associated with greater decline. Further, cessation of cannabis use did not fully restore neuropsychological functioning among adolescent-onset cannabis users. Findings are suggestive of a neurotoxic effect of cannabis on the adolescent brain and highlight the importance of prevention and policy efforts targeting adolescents.

# Why? Post publication peer review

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SciLogs

### **SIFTING THE EVIDENCE**

Blogging about research and ideas in the field of  
Epidemiology and Public Health

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## **Perspective on cannabis dependence and IQ**

29 August 2012 by [Suzi Gage](#), posted in [Uncategorized](#)

Reports from various news outlets have been discussing a [paper published a couple of days ago in PNAS](#). The paper investigates cannabis dependence, and it's relation to change in IQ. Media articles have interpreted these findings as 'cannabis use is harmful to adolescent brains, but not afterwards'. Now, before I go on, I should say that I'm not disputing that this may be the case, but I don't think this paper provides as strong evidence as is being reported, for a number of reasons, which I'll go through here.



**Suzi Gage**  
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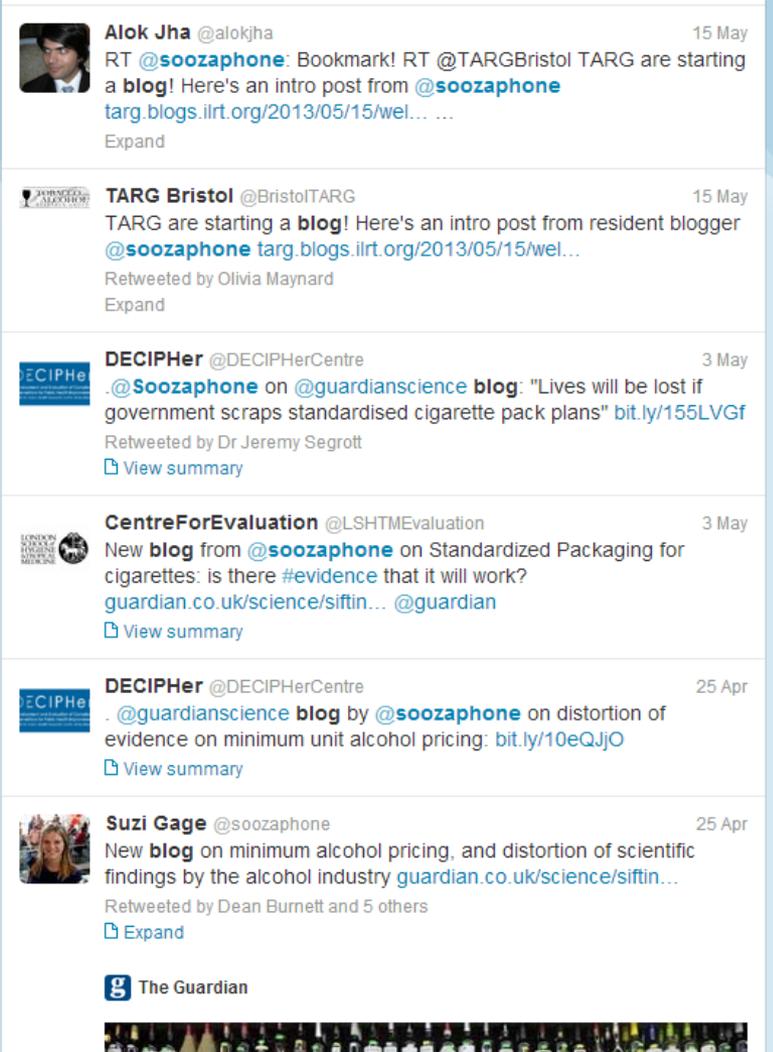
Search Sifting the Evidence



# How

- Join twitter (seriously)

twitter



**Alok Jha** @alokjha 15 May  
RT @soozaphone: Bookmark! RT @TARGBristol TARG are starting a **blog!** Here's an intro post from @soozaphone [targ.blogs.ilrt.org/2013/05/15/wel...](http://targ.blogs.ilrt.org/2013/05/15/wel...) ...  
Expand

**TARG Bristol** @BristolTARG 15 May  
TARG are starting a **blog!** Here's an intro post from resident blogger @soozaphone [targ.blogs.ilrt.org/2013/05/15/wel...](http://targ.blogs.ilrt.org/2013/05/15/wel...)  
Retweeted by Olivia Maynard  
Expand

**DECIPHer** @DECIPHerCentre 3 May  
@Soozaphone on @guardianscience **blog**: "Lives will be lost if government scraps standardised cigarette pack plans" [bit.ly/155LVGr](http://bit.ly/155LVGr)  
Retweeted by Dr Jeremy Segrott  
[View summary](#)

**CentreForEvaluation** @LSHTMEvaluation 3 May  
New **blog** from @soozaphone on Standardized Packaging for cigarettes: is there #evidence that it will work? [guardian.co.uk/science/siftin...](http://guardian.co.uk/science/siftin...) @guardian  
[View summary](#)

**DECIPHer** @DECIPHerCentre 25 Apr  
@guardianscience **blog** by @soozaphone on distortion of evidence on minimum unit alcohol pricing: [bit.ly/10eQJjO](http://bit.ly/10eQJjO)  
[View summary](#)

**Suzi Gage** @soozaphone 25 Apr  
New **blog** on minimum alcohol pricing, and distortion of scientific findings by the alcohol industry [guardian.co.uk/science/siftin...](http://guardian.co.uk/science/siftin...)  
Retweeted by Dean Burnett and 5 others  
[Expand](#)

**The Guardian**



# How - Team up



# How - Join a blogging network

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KEEPING YOU UP TO DATE WITH  
RELIABLE MENTAL HEALTH  
RESEARCH, POLICY & GUIDANCE

## The Mental Elf

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**Lithium prevents suicide in mood disorders, according to updated systematic review**

20 Responses »



Posted by  
John Baker

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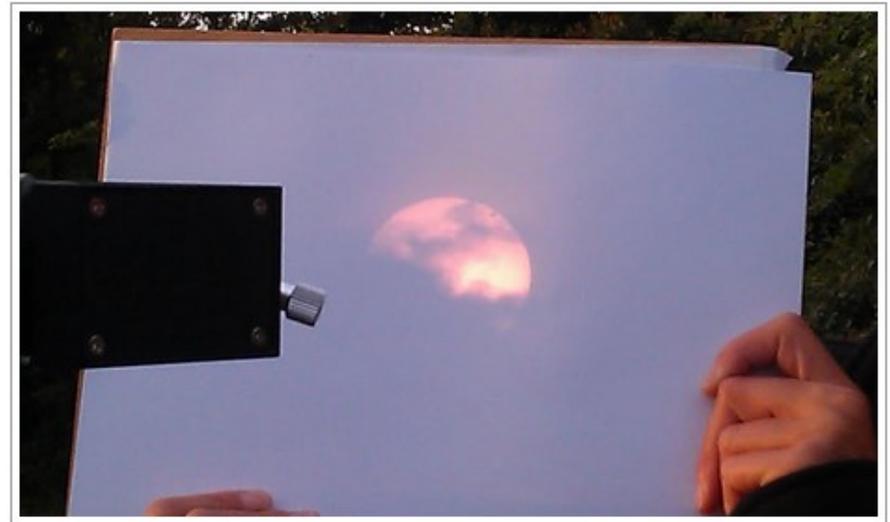
SciLogs

*The daily storyline of science*

- Write about what interests you
- Or, write about what you struggle to understand!

### Transit of Venus from St Werburghs Hill, Bristol!

6 June 2012 by [Suzi Gage](#), posted in [Uncategorized](#)



After seeing [Paige's](#) post about [witnessing the transit of Venus](#), I thought I'd

### Mendelian Randomisation and the Prevention of Spurious Findings

Posted 19 April 2012 by [Suzi Gage](#)

Epidemiology uses statistical methods to investigate patterns in public health. Or, if you believe certain news articles, it splits every possible life influence into things that either cause or cure cancer (or occasionally do both). Epidemiologists investigate health outcomes in a number of different ways, ranging from looking at changes in whole populations to conducting randomised controlled trials (RCTs), testing one intervention against another, or against the placebo effect. RCTs are the 'Gold Standard' of Epidemiological research, as their design... [Read more](#)

[Posted in Uncategorized](#) | [7 Comments](#) | [Permalink](#)

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TARG Blog

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## RECENT POSTS

- [Conferencing in South America: A tale of cocaine, capuchins, cachaça and chupacabra](#)
- [Journey to the front of the](#)

## [Conferencing in South America: A tale of cocaine, capuchins, cachaça and chupacabra](#)

September 24th, 2013

I have to admit, I'd been a little apprehensive about this trip. This was the first time invitation to present arrived in my inbox a little over a month ago, my head had been on travel plans.



DECIPHER BLOG

Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement  
A UKCRC Public Health Research Centre of Excellence

## Improving the evidence base on adolescent health

24/09/2013

0 Comments

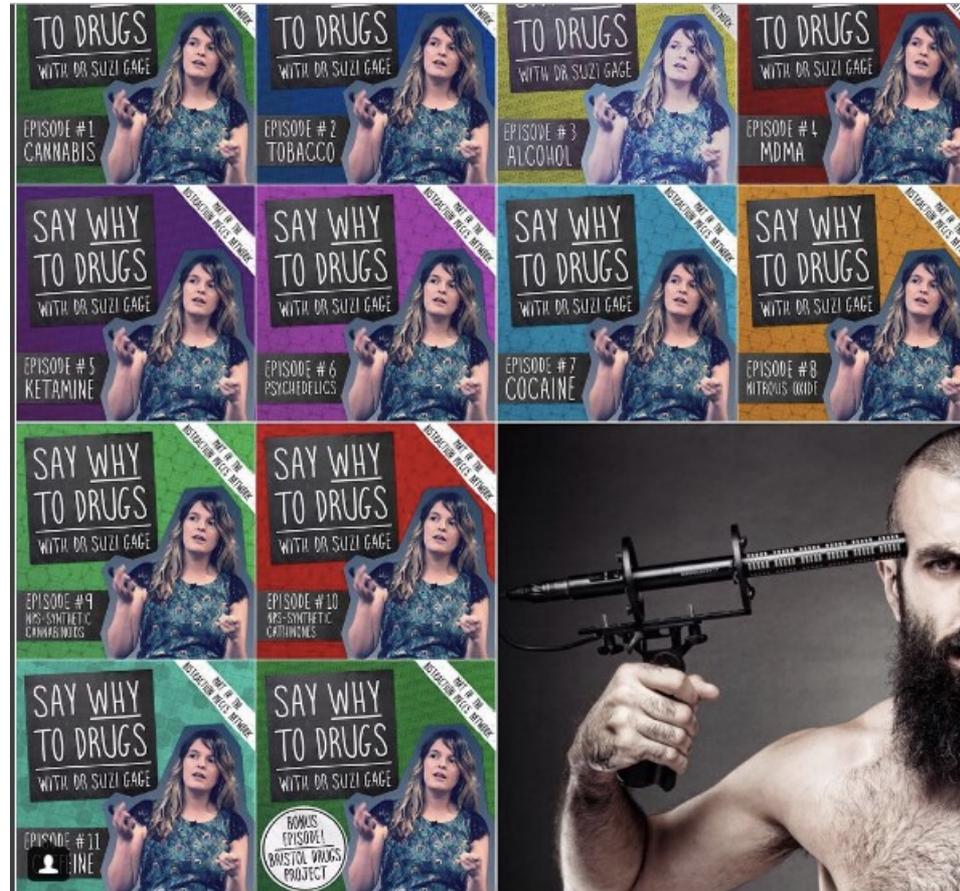
*Dr. Ann Hagell from the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH) looks at the implications of the latest 'Key Data on Adolescence' for research into adolescents' health and health needs.*

AYPH firmly believes that we need better, more accessible information about adolescent health. We also believe that we need to do this by focusing on adolescents as a standalone age group, rather than merging them together with all children. The experiences of young people are likely to vary according to age, and their health needs might also be different. To help professionals working with young people, AYPH publishes a compendium of statistics about young people's health every two years. We draw on data from government departments and other large representative surveys. The latest edition (*Key*

RSS Feed

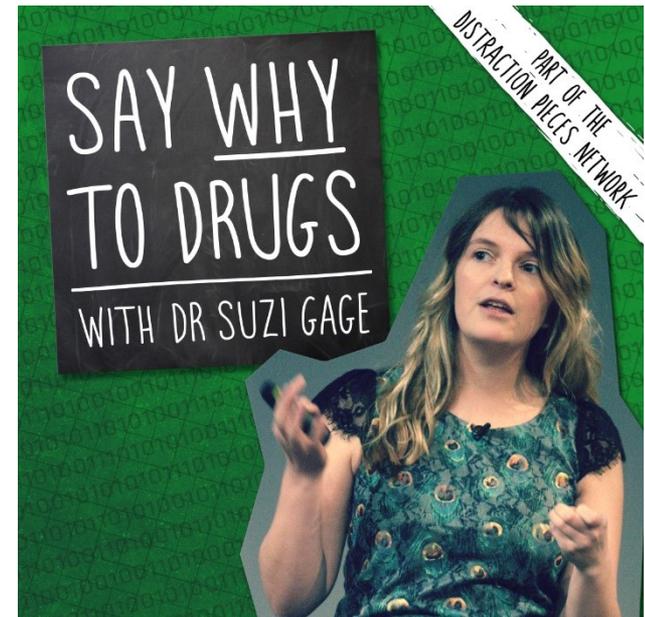
## About the blog

Welcome to the *DECIPHER* blog. This is the place where staff, students and guest bloggers share their reflections on some of the key issues in public health research.



# Say Why to Drugs Podcast

- The science around recreational drugs
- No judgment, no spin, no hyperbole
- Episodic podcast – one substance per episode
  - Appeal?
  - Short term effect
  - Long term effect
  - Myths
  - Benefits?
  - What don't we know



# Why a podcast?

- Flexible
  - Format
  - Length
- Accessible (?)
- Audience appropriate (?)
- Convenient for presenters!
- Acast app links to further reading/watching

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# Over to you!