

SSA PhD Studentship Final Report

Dr Maike Klein

Department of Social and Policy Sciences, University of Bath

PhD awarded April 2022

The lived experiences of relapse into opiate and crack cocaine misuse among recovering drug service users and addiction therapists: A multi-perspectival interpretative phenomenological analysis

Research abstract

Multiple relapses from illicit substance misuse after periods of abstinence can significantly exacerbate drug poisoning and subsequent overdose death. The United Kingdom (UK) experienced a steep rise in opiate and crack cocaine consumption in 2019 and recorded its highest numbers of heroin-related overdose deaths in 2020. Between 60-70 percent of drug service users who work towards recovery from opiate and cocaine misuse are reported to experience a relapse within 12 months of exiting structured treatment. Despite this, little is known about how relapse is experienced and made sense of, either by recovering drug service users or addiction therapists, which this study addresses. Beginning with a scoping review, this study examines the current evidence base on opiate and crack relapse and finds that qualitative explorations into relapse in the addiction literature are lacking. A review of UK drug policies and clinical guidelines also highlights a failure to acknowledge and address relapse. The empirical part of this study addresses these limitations in two ways. First, by exploring the lived experiences of opiate and crack relapse among recovering service users and among addiction therapists. Second, by investigating how users' and therapists' experiences co-exist in a therapeutic practice context. Guided by recovery-informed theory and hermeneutic phenomenology, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with seven recovering drug service users and seven addiction therapists. Data were subsequently analysed using a multi-perspectival approach to interpretative phenomenological analysis. Findings from the service user interviews identify two superordinate themes, highlighting that multiple relapses foster self-mistrust and a sense of powerlessness in service users, which subsequently shapes their view of themselves and of recovery. Findings from the therapist interviews identify three superordinate themes, revealing that therapists perceive relapse as complex and difficult to account for, which, over time, disempowers their therapeutic abilities. A subsequent cross-group analysis found a further three superordinate themes. These illuminate that users and therapists mirror feelings of powerlessness over relapse in a therapeutic relationship context; that long-term recovery provides a relapse risk environment; and that relapse shapes users' and therapists' perception of themselves in recovery. This study provides a novel understanding of opiate and crack cocaine relapse and highlights the need for clinical practice and policy to acknowledge and address the impact of relapse on those who are directly affected.

Useful links

The following organisations offer a variety of recovery support services for individuals who are at risk of substance misuse relapse as well as resources for relevant concerned others, practitioners and policymakers.

Forward Trust: <https://www.forwardtrust.org.uk/>

Bristol Drug Project: <https://www.bdp.org.uk/>

Recovery Research Institute: <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/>

National Institute on Drug Abuse: <https://nida.nih.gov/>

European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction: <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/>

Publications during candidature

Journal Articles

Klein, M., Dixon, J., & Butler, C. (in press). Multiple relapses into opiate and crack misuse among people in recovery: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Addictions and Offender Counseling*.

Klein, M., & Dixon, J. (2020). Problematising 'Recovery' in drug policy within Great Britain: A comparative policy analysis between England, Wales and Scotland. *Journal of Drug Policy Analysis*, 13(1), 1-17.

Klein, M. (2020). Relapse into opiate and crack cocaine misuse: A scoping review. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 29(2), 1-9.

Klein, M., & Milner, R. (2019). The use of body-mapping in interpretative phenomenological analyses: A methodological discussion. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 22(5), 533-543.

Book Chapters

Klein, M. & Hill, J. (2021). Provider and user perspectives on long-term recovery in England: How do we know when we are done? In S. Galvani, A. Roy & A. Clayson (Eds.), *Long-term Recovery from Substance Use: European Perspectives* (pp 53-64). Bristol, UK: Bristol Policy Press.

Klein, M. (2020). Diagnostik in der Drogensuchtbehandlung im Vereinigten Königreich Grossbritannien und Nordirland: Ein Überblick. In R. Hansjürgens & F. Schulte-Derne (Eds.), *Soziale Diagnostik in der Suchthilfe – Leitlinien und Instrumente für Soziale Arbeit* (pp. 125-137). Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Media Engagements

Klein, M. (2021, Feb 3rd). Addiction and Cognition. Society for the Study of Addiction PhD Symposium 2020. <https://www.addiction-ssa.org/phd-symposium-session-3-1-addiction-and-cognition/>

Klein, M. (2021, Feb 10th). Addiction and Policy. Society for the Study of Addiction PhD Symposium 2020. <https://www.addiction-ssa.org/phd-symposium-session-4-0-addiction-and-policy/>

Klein, M. (2021, Mar 3rd). Smoking and Gambling. Society for the Study of Addiction PhD Symposium 2020. <https://www.addiction-ssa.org/phd-symposium-session-5-1-smoking-and-gambling/>

I am currently writing up my third study from my thesis which focuses on multiple relapses from opiate and crack misuse from the lived experience perspectives of addiction therapists.

Presentations during candidature

Over the last three years as a PhD student, I have been able to present my work at various national and international conferences to academics as well as practitioners and policymakers in the field. This included posters and oral presentations at the Annual Southwest Doctoral Training Partnership Conferences (2018 and 2019). I have also been invited to present my work at various research groups, including at the University of Bath (2019 and 2021) and at Manchester Metropolitan University (2021). I have also been fortunate to have been able to present my research at the Annual SSA PhD Symposium (2018 and 2021) as well as at the Substance Use and Associative Behaviours (SUAB) PhD Symposium (2021) and the German Addictions Congress (2021).

Aim for dissemination

Advocacy was at the heart of my PhD research. Therefore, dissemination will be ongoing and include continued publications in peer-reviewed journals, a policy press statement as well as a visual infographic comic clip through the University of Bath communications officer, and further presentations at national as well as international conferences.

Network

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), registered Member
- Federation of Drug and Alcohol Practitioners (FDAP), accredited Member
- German Society for Social Work in the Addiction Treatment (DG-SAS), Member
- Society for the Study of Addiction (SSA), Associate

Future direction

I will continue to merge my work as a counselling psychologist with that of an addiction scientist. Thanks to the SSA PhD Studentship, I was able to identify valuable nuances in our collective understanding of substance misuse relapse. This set the foundation for me to explore relapse from substance misuse further. I am currently seeking funding to develop support strategies for individuals who are at risk for relapse and to provide direction for future practice guidelines. Future projects will also include substance misuse and mental health within the creative arts industry.

Additionally, I have begun to collaborate with Prof David Best on a recovery capital trial in the UK which explores the needs of individuals in recovery from substance misuse.

Finally, I have been afforded a Lecturer position which will allow me to implement some of my findings when designing lectures on substance misuse for new clinical psychologists.