

BOOK REVIEW

Substance Use and Abuse in South Africa: Insights from Brain and Behavioural Sciences

George F R Ellis, Dan J Stein, Kevin G F Thomas, Ernesta M Meintjies, editors. UCT Press. 2012. ISBN: 978-1-91989-529-1.

The book is an edited collection written by experienced scholars as well as practitioners which makes it especially useful in providing an evidence-based approach to understanding substance use and abuse. The fields of expertise range from psychiatry, clinical and neuro-psychology, and human genetics to economics and mathematics. As such, it represents an active cohort of researchers and practitioners working in the area of substance use and abuse in South Africa. The volume is divided into three sections, *Epidemiology and Symptomatology*, *Neuroscience and Psychology* and *Intervention and Policy*, focusing on the most salient issues related to substance use and abuse. The introductory chapter provides a very good overview of what each chapter deals with and therefore helps the reader navigate to the chapters that are of immediate interest. The book is very useful in bringing together strands of research distributed over many sources. It therefore serves not only as an overview of the most pertinent issues related to substance use and abuse in South Africa, but as a helpful reference for the most relevant scientific work to emerge on this

issue over the last 20 years. For example, while chapter 1 deals with prevalence issues, chapter 2 is focused on the clinical presentation of substance-related disorders, and in relation to mental disorders. Overall, most of the chapters are written in an accessible way and tend to avoid the practice of writing chapters densely packed with information in which the reader may have little interest.

Given that substance use is characterised as a public health issue in broad terms, it would have been useful to provide an overview of the best approaches to dealing with the problem of substance use as encountered in the practice of general medicine and not only in relation to evaluated school-based interventions (chapter 14). For example, the utility of screening brief intervention and referral (SBIRT) would have been a useful addition to the chapters under the section dealing with intervention and policy, even though the South African evidence for such interventions is only recently under way.

Nevertheless, no single volume is able to cover the vast range of issues and approaches to the problem of substance use and abuse on its own, and this is a valuable contribution to the field and practice of substance use and abuse in South Africa. It is strongly recommended to a broad readership.

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