How drug users with depression view their condition: a qualitative study

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What do we know about depression and drug use?

• Common ¹

• Three types of connection ²
  – Drug use causing depression
  – Depression causing drug use
  – Both sharing common causative factors

• Outcomes for depression or drug treatment not adversely affected ¹³
Depression and qualitative studies

• Depressive ‘careers’¹
• Typology of causation ²
• Management techniques, blotting out symptoms, engagement in activities and with others ³
Aims

• To investigate how heroin and crack cocaine users with ‘depression’ describe their condition
Method

• Qualitative (semi-structured interviews and one focus group)
• Recruitment criteria: Receiving methadone/subutex and an antidepressant
• Interview schedule: ideas about causation, effects of condition(s), management
• All interviews recorded and fully transcribed, analysed standard qualitative techniques
Results

• Total approached: 25
• Interviewed: 17 (11 male)
• All interviewed in the surgery
• Average age 34.5 (range 26-47)
• All had used heroin and all but one crack cocaine
Causation

- Vague onset of ‘depression’
- All three mechanisms
- Events leading to depression and social networks where drug taking is the norm
- Drug taking leading to consequences which caused ‘depression’.
Causation: adverse events leading to ‘depression’ and drug taking

- ‘I just got put on a truck with bloke that I didn’t even know and moved to a new school with no one I didn’t know and that’s when it all started... So then I started getting into trouble and that and I started meeting people with the drugs’
Effects of drug taking/depression

• Loss
• ‘Stigma’
• Isolation
Stigma

- Few stigmatising ideas about ‘depression’
- Drug-taking discrediting and a cause of depression
Stigma

• ‘Then I’ll use the heroin to come down which you’ll have heard a thousand times, and then I do feel absolutely terrible, you feel the guilt and the you feel worse in yourself for what you’ve done’
Isolation

- Drug acquaintances rather than friends
- Some alternative ideas
Isolation

• ‘But they’re not in my eyes, they’re not friends. They’re just acquaintances or just people who I know... They’ve all let me down and they’ve all shit on me so to speak and that.’
Isolation: family

- ‘I’ll make a phone call to my mother so, er, even though I blame her for like years ago, it’s just, that’s the only other person I’d talk to’
Management

• Blocking out depressive thoughts
  – Few ‘self-help’ mechanisms
  – Problems with ‘talking’
  – ‘Drugs’ and antidepressants

• Beliefs about antidepressant medication
  – Keeping ‘level’
  – ‘Addiction’ worries
Antidepressants

• ‘I carried on taking ‘em and I started feeling a lot better, ‘cause like my mind racers and it stopped that’
Summary

• The three types of connection confirmed, but:
  – Stress on adverse events leading to ‘at-risk’ social networks
  – Drugs lead to depression indirectly
• Stigmatising effect of drug taking, and a causation factor for ‘depression’
• Isolation
• Non-medical views about antidepressant action