

E. Drug policy and poverty issues

Reference

S. Mac Gregor, 'Social exclusion: an overview', in: G. Greenwood and K. Roberston (eds.), *Understanding and responding to drug use: the role of qualitative research*, EMCDDA Scientific Monograph Series No. 4, Office for official publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, 2000, p. 119 - 126.

Commentary

Susanne Mac Gregor is professor of social policy at the Middlesex University in London and member of the Social Policy Research Centre of the School of Social Science at the Middlesex University.

The article is part of a monograph on the role of qualitative research in understanding and responding to drug use. Part V of this publication is dedicated to the theme of social exclusion and drug use. Besides this article, other issues are included, e.g. on qualitative action research projects among ethnic minority communities and on ethnographic research located in a specific geographical context.

The initiative for this scientific monograph was taken by the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

More information on qualitative research on drugs can be found on the Qualitative European Drug Research Network (QED), which is an EMCDDA project; URL: qed.emcdda.org.

Furthermore, the United Kingdom Drug Report 2001 provides an overview of the current situation regarding drug use in the UK. Chapter 4 of this report provides an extensive part on social exclusion and some interesting references; URL: drugscope.org.uk/druginfo/drugreport.asp.

Abstract

The author argues that the concept of social exclusion is not so much different from the concept of poverty, be it that the strength of recent definitions of social exclusion is the awareness that individual traits, strengths and weaknesses are not the only explanation for behaviour, and that policy has to focus on social relations and on the individual.

Social exclusion is a complex phenomenon with many intertwined aspects, including childhood poverty, young parenthood, extramarital births, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, lacking educational

qualifications, being in receipt of welfare benefits, low income and living in distinct areas or neighbourhoods.

Therefore, policy interventions need to recognize the way in which problems are linked together and are better treated holistically. In this respect, the need for greater coordination of policy responses becomes apparent, not only in order to have greater effect, but also because policies may sometimes be as much the cause as the solution of problems.