

A sobering thought: One billion smokers and 240 million people with alcohol use disorder worldwide

A new study published today in the journal *Addiction* has compiled the best, most up-to-date evidence on addictive disorders globally. It shows that almost 5% of the world's adult population (240 million people) have an alcohol use disorder and more than 20% (1 billion people) smoke tobacco. Getting good data on other drugs such as heroin and cannabis is much more difficult but for comparison the number of people injecting drugs is estimated at around 15 million worldwide.

The "Global Statistics on Addictive Behaviours: 2014 Status Report" goes further in showing that the harm to society from legal drugs is many times the harm from illicit drugs. For example, alcohol use is estimated to result in loss of 257 disability adjusted life year per 100,000 of population compared with just 83 for illicit drugs.

There are huge regional differences in use of addictive drugs. The heaviest drinkers are in Eastern Europe where 13.6 litres of alcohol is consumed per head of population each year, followed by Northern Europe at 11.5 litres. Central, Southern and Western Asia have the lowest consumption at 2.1 litres.

Eastern Europe also has the most smokers at 30.0% of adults, closely followed by Oceania at 29.5% and Western Europe at 28.5%. This compares with Africa at 14%. North and Central America with the

Caribbean have the highest rates of injecting drug use at 0.8%, which is more than twice the rate in Northern Europe at 0.3%.

The authors of the report note that there are important limitations to the data, more so for illicit than legal drugs, but believe that putting all this information in one place will make it easier for governments and international agencies to develop policies to combat this scourge.

The report's lead author, Associate Professor Linda Gowing, based at the University of Adelaide in South Australia, said "Bringing all this data together has been very challenging but having this global snapshot in one accessible resource should prove invaluable for policymakers and researchers".

UCL (University College London) Professor Robert West, an author of the report and Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Addiction*, which commissioned the report, said "The most striking thing to emerge is how much more damage is done to society by legal drugs than illegal ones. It is a stark reminder of how the need to create shareholder value can work against global health and wellbeing."

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For editors:

Gowing LR, Ali RL, Allsop S, Marsden J, Turf EE, West R, and Witton J. (2015) Global statistics on addictive behaviours: 2014 status report. *Addiction* 110: doi: [10.1111/add.12899](https://doi.org/10.1111/add.12899)