

Integrating substance use teaching into the social work curriculum

Social workers are on the front line of working with people whose alcohol and other drug use is related to the difficulties they are experiencing.

However, social work education at qualifying (Q) and post qualifying (PQ) levels has not traditionally included training on the subject. As a result many social workers report feeling unprepared for discussing alcohol and other drug use with service users (Galvani and Forrester 2008). The social work curricula need to equip social workers with the knowledge and confidence to identify and support service users who have problems with their alcohol and other drug use. This guide is designed to support social work academics seeking to include input on substance use in their teaching on Q or PQ programmes.

Top tips

Begin with a values and attitudes discussion – this can follow an excerpt from a DVD film or stem from small group exercises

Don't reinvent the wheel - download teaching resources for use in substance use teaching from the SWAP website (see further resources).

Ask social work colleagues, be they academic or practice colleagues/ friends, for examples of practice where substance use was an issue and develop a case study exercise from them.

Check whether there are academics in sociology, psychology or medicine within the University or College who have an interest in substance use and invite them to contribute.

Try to ensure basic alcohol/drug awareness precedes any specialist pathway teaching session. People really need to know the basics for the specialist input to make sense.

Invite local drug and alcohol specialists to deliver teaching and/or to develop case study material.



How to integrate substance teaching across the curriculum

Practice learning

- Contact agencies in your region to ask about placements (students value the opportunity for practice placements within alcohol and drug agencies (Galvani and Forrester 2008)).
- Include case studies or exercises in practice learning portfolios. Ask students to reflect on the effects of a second party's substance use, and to consider the social services and agency support that was, or should have been, available to those impacted by this use.

Specialist children or adults teaching

- Include the impact of parental substance use on children together with the issue of intervention when child welfare becomes a concern in modules on children and families.
- Mental health teaching could include discussion about the relationship between substance use and mental health, the interaction of medication with alcohol and other drugs and could look at access to appropriate services.
- Topics focused on young people could explore substance use as part of maturation and risk taking as opposed to forgetting negative experiences and escaping problems at home.

Assessed work options

Set substance use assessment topics on research skills training modules. Examples might include finding literature on the prevalence rates of solvent use among young people over the last 10 years, or the nature of the relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse.

- Ensure module essay titles include one or more relating to substance use. For example, 'explore the relationship between social exclusion and alcohol and drug problems', or 'what is the relationship between childhood trauma and the development of adult substance problems'.
- Develop case studies for use in practice learning portfolios or for the assessment of theory and methods. Ensure the case study includes issues of drug or alcohol use and gives scope for some exploration of assessment and intervention. Alternately use case studies in group discussions, exercises or role plays as part of skills assessment and observation.
- Encourage students to explore dissertation research topics that link substance use with their preferred area of practice.

“without relevant training how can newly qualified social workers be expected to understand/relate to difficulties faced by service users and their families?”
(Newly Qualified Social Worker)



Integration models

5hr, 10hr, and 25hr teaching on alcohol and drugs

| 5 hrs (approx 1 day) | 10hrs (approx 2 days) | 25hrs (approx 5 days) |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Values and attitudes | Values and attitudes | Values and attitudes |
| Reasons people use | Reasons people use | Reasons people use |
| Basic alcohol awareness | Basic alcohol awareness | Basic alcohol awareness |
| Basic drug awareness | Basic drug awareness | Basic drug awareness |
| | Assessment: asking the right questions in the right way | Assessment: asking the right questions in the right way |
| | Types of intervention available and the Social Work role | Types of intervention available and the Social Work role |
| | Referring to specialist services | Referring to specialist services |
| | | Partnership work with substance specialists |
| | | Substance use and mental ill health |
| | | Domestic violence and substance use |
| | | Impact on the family and children |
| | | Resilience and protective factors |
| | | Skill development and practice |

“integrate alcohol and drug use early into core teaching”

Overcoming barriers to integration

- Not enough space on the curriculum? Add alcohol and other drug use tasks and exercises early into core modules or identify one day for basic awareness training.
- Don't know where to start? – Decide where the teaching would fit then talk to local services. Insert a discussion on substance use into values and attitudes teaching. Develop case studies with colleagues and practice partners. Approach module leaders about including some specialist input that in their modules.
- Not confident enough to teach on this subject? Call your local alcohol and drugs service to ask for help. Alternatively explore the options for cross-discipline teaching with psychology or medicine (and simultaneously meet the GSCC requirements in this area).

“Alongside other frontline services, social work and has repeatedly been criticized for not adequately identifying and addressing substance use”
(Ofsted 2008)



Further resources

Online resources

- **Learning and teaching guide: social work and substance use, teaching the basics.** Examples of teaching activities for seven core substance use topics. www.swap.ac.uk/docs/guide_su_learning&teaching.pdf
- **Case studies: teaching substance use in social work education.** Variety of case studies for small group teaching provided by front line social workers and service users. www.swap.ac.uk/docs/cs_substancemis2.pdf
- **Information sheet: key resources for teaching substance use.** Multiple resources selected for their relevance to social work and their reliability. www.swap.ac.uk/docs/is_keyresources.pdf
- **Information sheet: domestic violence and substance use in the social work curriculum.** Selected resources including websites, DVDs, texts. www.swap.ac.uk/docs/is_domestic_violence.pdf
- **Helpsheet: involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education.** Things to consider when involving specialists. www.swap.ac.uk/docs/hs_substancemis1.pdf
- **Helpsheet: using substance use research tools to promote learning and teaching.** How to use two research tools. www.swap.ac.uk/docs/hs_su_researchtools.pdf

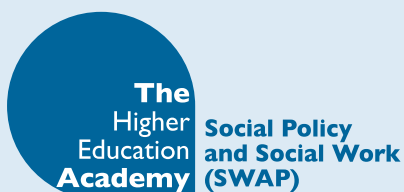
- **Social work, alcohol and drugs:** a website specifically for social workers wanting information on alcohol and drugs within a social work practice. www.swapcdugs.com

Other publications

- www.swapcdugs.com Galvani, S. & Forrester, D. (2008). *What works in training social workers about drug and alcohol use? A survey of student learning and readiness to practice.* Final report for the Home Office.
- Ofsted. (2008). *Learning lessons, taking action: Ofsted's evaluations of serious case reviews 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.* Retrieved August, 2009, from www.ofsted.gov.uk

Contributors:

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