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## CRIMINAL JUSTICE MATTERS

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The drugs debate is at an impasse. Despite the publication of 'Tackling Drugs Together' which attempted to set out in relatively clear terms a three year plan for addressing the issue of drug use and misuse there is considerable uncertainty in the expanding drugs industry about the future direction of policy. This is partly because there is a conspicuous lack of solid information on patterns of drug use around the country with the result that national policy is guided by a number of localised studies which may or may not be representative of the population as a whole.

This patchy empirical knowledge base is mirrored by equally limited data on the effectiveness of different preventative and treatment strategies.

It is, on reflection, not particularly surprising that the 'drugs problem' is conceptualised in vague and often limited ways. The current clamour for a 'war on drugs', and the overtly negative images of drug use which are promoted in exercises such as the 'Just Say No' campaign highlight the ways in which the fears and anxieties about different forms of drug use have been mobilised in recent years. The articles in this special issue of CJM attempt to provide a more informed and balanced perspective. Drawing on available, and in some cases original research, the respective authors comment on this important but complex issue from a number of perspectives. In the introductory article **Roy Porter** points to the historical and social conditions for the introduction of the concepts of 'drug addiction' and 'drug dependency'.

In the current period a central point of focus and debate has been the relation between drug misuse and the criminal justice system. **Mike Hough** examines this relation through a review of the available literature looking in particular at the suggested links between drugs and crime. **Karim Murji** examines changing patterns of enforcement, while in an interview **DCI Simon Foy** comments on current policing strategies in the Met.

**Annette Dale** and **Colin Webster** examine the use of drugs amongst young people and Asian youth. The relatively low level of usage amongst Asian young people which has been reported in recent surveys raises questions about the cultural and social dimensions of drug use.

One illicit drug which has received a great deal of attention over the last year is Ecstasy. **Roger Matthews** reports on a public debate which was held in central London in which the use of this drug was discussed. The role of drugs prevention has been increasingly emphasised in recent years. **Karen Duke** and **Susanne McGregor** assess 'What Works' in drugs prevention, while **Mike Shiner** and **Tim Newburn** look at the role of peer educators in improving the quality of information and the levels of understanding which young people have about the effects of drug use. Drug use in prisons has also been the focus of increased public attention. The introduction of mandatory drug testing, as **Alex Stevens** argues may not have the effect of reducing drug use in prison but rather may encourage a change in the type of drugs used by inmates. In a similar vein **Carol Martin** discusses the introduction of the Substance Abuse Treatment Programme in HMP Downview and assesses its impact upon those prisoners who participated in the programme.

The nature of the debate on drugs in this country is continuously fuelled by examples of drug control or prevention strategies taken from other advanced Western countries. **Nigel South** identifies two American scenarios of drug control and assesses the relevance of these options for 'over here'. **Maggy Lee** examines the measures which have been put in place in different countries to influence the consumption of cannabis; while **Nicholas Dorn** reviews developments in European drugs policies and enforcement strategies.

It is clear from the various contributions to this issue that developing informed and effective responses to drug use requires more detailed research and evaluation.

The available evidence suggests that styles and patterns of drug use, particularly amongst young people are rapidly changing, and that providing a comprehensive drugs strategy for the 'post heroin' generation will require the formulation of policies which are more realistic and sensitive to the experiences of those involved.

Roger Matthews & Julia Braggins