

The Alcohol & Drug Abuse Research Unit

Working to reduce the health and social risks of alcohol and drug abuse

building a healthy nation through research



The Alcohol & Drug Abuse Research Unit (ADARU) comprises a team of researchers and support staff based in Cape Town and Pretoria. We conduct research, and develop and analyse policy on alcohol and other drug use and related problems. We work in South Africa and other parts of the sub-continent. The unit itself is relatively young, but has as its foundation substance abuse projects that have been carried out by MRC researchers since the early 1990s.

Our work

The work we do aims to reduce alcohol and other drug use and minimise the associated burdens experienced by individuals and society (such as crime and sexual risk behaviour).

Our primary activity is research. We carry out our own research projects and collaborate on studies with other researchers. In addition, we assist other researchers by providing training on research methods and technical assistance on how to conduct research in the field.

The studies we conduct generate information that may be used for proposing policies and informing prevention and treatment programmes.

A range of individuals, groups and organisations use the knowledge and policy inputs that are generated by the unit. Among these are local, provincial and national government; regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC); international agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC); NGOs, schools, and businesses; and the public at large.

Our goals

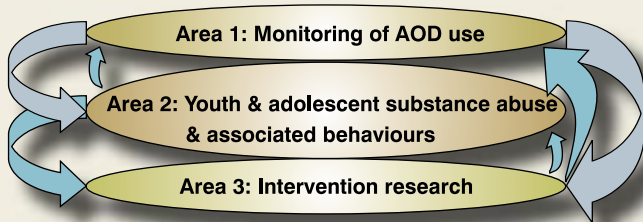
- To measure the nature and extent of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and associated consequences, as well as trends in AOD use and consequences over time;
- To identify current and future risk and protective factors for substance abuse, or reasons why people use AODs;
- To design and evaluate appropriate preventative and other interventions;
- To help projects get off the ground by supporting advocacy work and providing information that will allow policy makers, service providers and community representatives to make informed decisions; and



- To undertake research that will lead to better methods for assessing the prevalence of AOD use and associated consequences, and for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions.

These goals are achieved through:

- Research projects and other activities undertaken by ADARU alone;
- Research partnerships with other MRC programmes (e.g. the Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme), universities (e.g. UCT, UKZN, UWC) and other research institutions (e.g. HSRC, CSIR);
- Collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations;
- Partnerships with international organisations such as the SADC, WHO and UNODC; and
- Sub-contracts with local and international research agencies.



Our research

Our research focuses on three separate but related areas:

Area 1 deals with the nature and extent of alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and the related consequences. This research feeds into Area 2, which focuses on why people develop AOD use problems in the first place. Intervention research, the focus of Area 3, is conducted to determine effective ways of preventing and treating AOD use problems.

The following are some examples of research conducted in each of these areas:

Area 1: Monitoring of AOD use and associated consequences

- Monitoring of the extent of substance abuse in various areas in South Africa via more than fifty treatment centres in Cape Town, Gauteng, Durban, Mpumalanga, East London and Port Elizabeth. These activities are coordinated by the South African Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SACENDU).

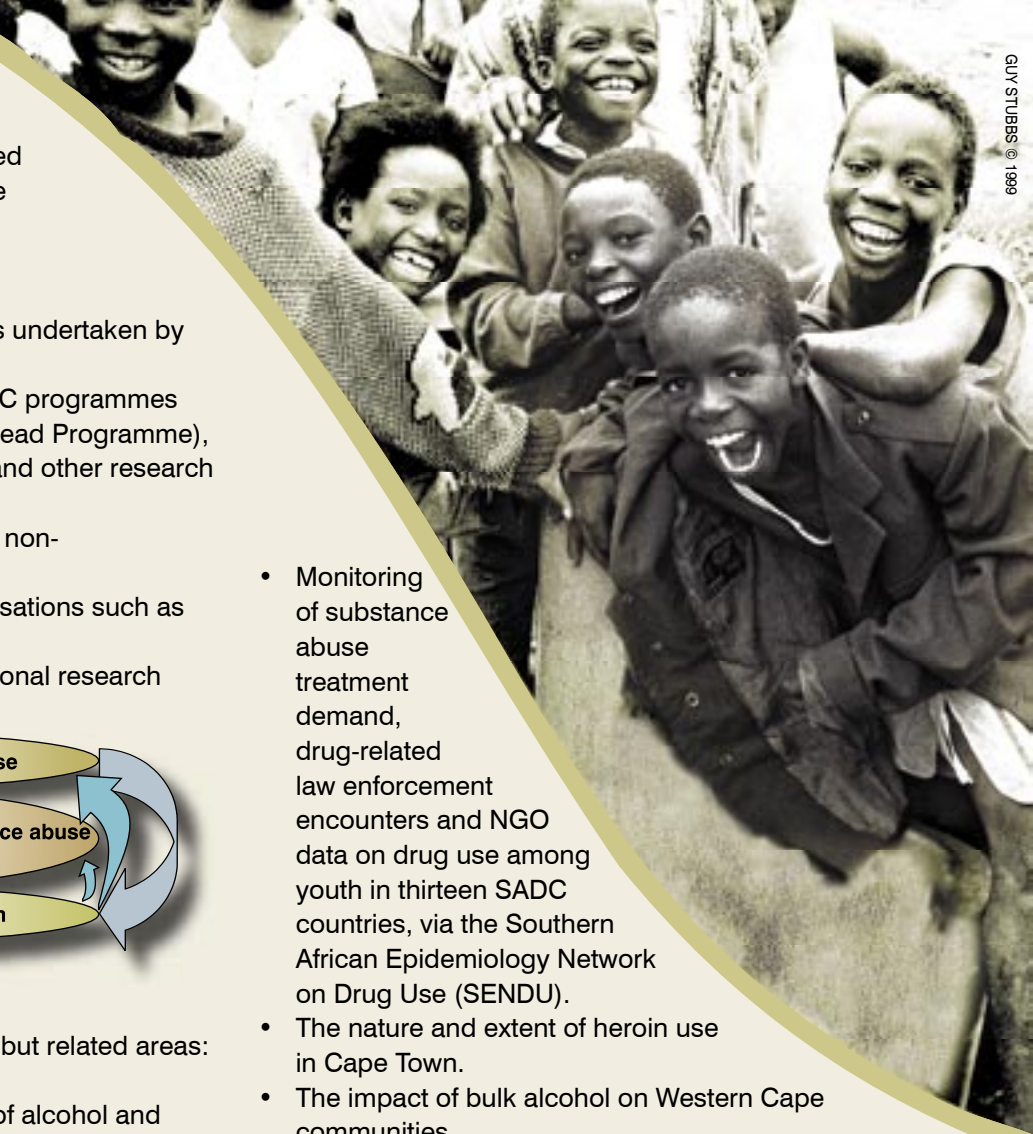
- Monitoring of substance abuse treatment demand, drug-related law enforcement encounters and NGO data on drug use among youth in thirteen SADC countries, via the Southern African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (SENDU).
- The nature and extent of heroin use in Cape Town.
- The impact of bulk alcohol on Western Cape communities.

From Area 1 we have found that adolescents are increasingly becoming involved in the use of alcohol and a range of illegal drugs such as Ecstasy, methamphetamine, dagga and Mandrax. In Cape Town and Gauteng an increasing number of young people are starting to use heroin.

Injection drug use is increasing, and we are also noticing shifts in patterns of drug use in communities where the use of certain drugs was historically low.

Many young people are now seeking help from centres that specialize in treating people with drug problems.

For descriptions of various drugs and their effects please consult our fact sheets at the following website: <http://www.sahealthinfo.org/admodule/factsheets.htm>



Area 2: Youth and adolescent substance abuse and associated risk behaviours

- Urbanisation and drug use in adolescents.
- HIV risk behaviour and drug use in South African adolescents.
- Alcohol and HIV infection.
- HIV transmission behaviour in young adults.
- Smoking among South African adolescents.

From Area 2 our findings suggest that young people use alcohol and other drugs because of their personality attributes and friendship networks, low levels of parental involvement, and community and societal pressures.

Our studies also show that the use of legal and illegal drugs is strongly associated with sexual risk behaviour among adolescents.

Area 3: Intervention Research

- A comprehensive evaluation of a non-profit outpatient drug treatment centre in Cape Town.
- An audit of substance abuse treatment facilities in Cape Town and Gauteng.
- The implementation and evaluation of an HIV risk reduction intervention among hard-to-reach substance abusers in the Western Cape.
- Reduction in HIV risk behaviours among adolescents in Pietermaritzburg.
- An outcome evaluation of UN ODC-funded treatment facilities.

From Area 3 our preliminary findings suggest that interventions that target the family, schools and the wider community as well as adolescents themselves are more effective at preventing and treating drug misuse than are interventions that focus solely on the adolescent.

Our services

- Providing research outputs and policy information.
- Consultation on methods for conducting substance abuse research.
- Policy analysis and recommendations.
- Teaching and supervision of postgraduate students.

Our funders

The Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research Unit (and its predecessor, the Mental Health & Substance Abuse Division of the MRC) has been funded by the following agencies:

South Africa

Provincial government (Social Services & Population Development, Gauteng; Economic Affairs, Agriculture & Tourism, Western Cape), national government (Arts, Culture, Science & Technology; Health; Social Development), NGOs (Health Systems Trust; Institute for Security Studies).

International

RTI International, European Union (via SADC), universities (Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York University, University of Kentucky); UN Office on Drugs & Crime, US government (Fogarty International Center, National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institute of Justice), World Bank, World Health Organization.

Career information

The minimum qualification for researchers working in the unit is an honours degree in the health or social sciences (e.g. psychology, sociology, public health, demography). However, most of our researchers have masters- or doctoral-level qualifications.

Both the Cape Town and Pretoria offices have internship opportunities funded by the Medical Research Council's Research Development Directorate.

Contact us

Cape Town

Prof Charles Parry (Director)
Mrs Susan Hon (Chief Officer)
Alcohol & Drug Abuse
Research Unit
Medical Research Council
PO Box 19070
Tygerberg
7505
South Africa
Tel: +27-21-938-0324
Fax: +27-21-938-0342
E-mail: shon@mrc.ac.za

Pretoria

Dr Neo Morojele (Deputy Director)
Mrs Judy Hassett (Senior Secretary)
Alcohol & Drug Abuse
Research Unit
Medical Research Council
Private Bag X385
Pretoria
0001
South Africa
Tel: +27-12-339-8620
Fax: +27-12-339-8594
E-mail: jhassett@mrc.ac.za

