Substance abuse, addictions and offending in England: A perspective from a Forensic Psychiatrist

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Dependence on alcohol or drugs alone is not grounds for detention under the Mental Health Act 2007 of England and Wales. Substance misuse or addiction are associated with offending due to: An altered mental state due to intoxication, withdrawal or an organic mental disorder and finance substance misuse and offences under misuse of drugs legislation. Alcohol abuse is present in up to one half of individuals who commit offences of violence. Alcohol dependence syndrome is associated with an eight times higher rate of convictions. About half of those with drug dependence syndrome have convictions before they become dependent. In general, individuals are considered criminally responsible if they voluntarily took drugs and alcohol, exceptions being if they were involuntarily intoxicated or if they were voluntarily intoxicated to a degree that they lacked specific intent (mens rea) or substance misuse has induced a mental illness. In the case of homicides, 7-10% of offenders may be alcohol dependent and 6-8% drug dependent. The association between schizophrenia and violence may be increased by substance misuse by 3-4 times. Offender behavioral programs in prison and community in England include offender substance abuse programs and programs for individual substance misusers (PRISM). There is also a Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO) available as a community court sentence. Other addictions that may lead to offending include pathological gambling, nonparaphilic sexual addiction and Problematic Internet Use (PIU).

Biography

Ian Treasaden is currently the Honorary Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist at West London Mental Health Trust and Visiting Senior Lecturer at Bucks New University England. He has worked as a Consultant Forensic Psychiatrist at the 3 Bridges Medium Secure Unit in London for mentally disordered offenders where he was also a Clinical Director and Honorary Senior Lecturer at Imperial College London.