

**Attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco,  
alcohol or cannabis use among people with and  
without mental disorders**

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**Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Statement of Originality**

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library\*\*, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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I hereby certify that this thesis is in the form of a series of published papers of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement from each co-author, endorsed by the Faculty Assistant Dean (Research Training), attesting to my contribution to the joint publications.

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Louise Thornton

Date



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## **List of citations for papers included in this thesis**

**Paper 1:** Thornton, L., Baker, A. L., Johnson, M. P., & Lewin, T. J. (in press). Attitudes and perceptions towards substances among people with mental disorders: A systematic review. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, DOI: 10.1111/j.1600-0447.2012.01861.x.

**Paper 2:** Thornton, L., Baker, A., Johnson, M. P., & Lewin, T. (2012). Reasons for tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among people with psychotic disorders: Method triangulation approach. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 26, 279-288.

**Paper 3:** Thornton, L., Baker, A. L., Johnson, M. P., & Kay-Lambkin, F. (2011). Perceptions of anti-smoking public health campaigns among people with psychotic disorders. *Mental Health and Substance Use*, 4, 105-115.

**Paper 4:** Thornton, L. K., Baker, A. L., Lewin, T., Kay-Lambkin, F. J., Kavanagh, D. J., Richmond, R., Kelly, B., & Johnson, M. P. (2012). Reasons for substance use among people with mental disorders. *Addictive Behaviors*, 37, 427-434.

**Paper 5:** Thornton, L. K., Johnson, M. P., Baker, A. L., & Kay-Lambkin, F. J. (in submission). Attitudes and perceptions of people with and without mental disorders regarding tobacco, alcohol or cannabis. *Qualitative Health Research*.

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Louise Thornton

Date





## Abstract

Co-occurring substance use and mental disorders are a major health problem. Substance use disorders are very common among people with mental disorders, cost health care systems large amounts of money and have been consistently linked to a number of adverse consequences among this population. It is clear therefore that effective intervention and preventative strategies are needed to address these co-occurring disorders and it is suggested that a clear understanding of people's attitudes and perceptions regarding substances is needed to develop such strategies. Very little research investigating the substance related attitudes and perceptions among people with mental disorders exists.

The broad aim of this thesis was to generate a greater understanding of attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis among people with mental disorders. To address this aim the thesis presents five papers. *Paper 1* describes a systematic review of current literature investigating attitudes and perceptions towards tobacco, alcohol and cannabis among people with mental disorders. The review aimed to identify the strengths, weaknesses and gaps in this literature. *Paper 2* and *Paper 3* describe a study of attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis among people with psychotic disorders. This study elicited both quantitative and qualitative data and aimed to identify any similarities and differences between participants' reasons for tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use. It also aimed to generate some initial insights regarding the perceived effectiveness of anti-tobacco public health campaigns among people with mental disorders. *Paper 4* describes a study which investigated reasons for tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among people with depression or a psychotic disorder. It aimed to identify similarities and differences in

reasons for substance use between people with different mental disorders. *Paper 5* describes a qualitative study of attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis among people with a psychotic disorder, current symptoms of depression or without a mental disorder. The study aimed to generate insights regarding a range of substance related attitudes and perceptions by employing a flexible interview schedule that allowed issues important to the participants to be raised.

The concluding chapter of this thesis reviews and synthesizes the main findings of these five papers and discusses their implications for future research and the development of effective intervention and prevention strategies. The findings of this thesis suggest that attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis differ considerably. While all three substances were found to be used to cope with stress and to relax, this reason was particularly important for tobacco use among people with and without mental disorders. Social factors were found to play an important role in the alcohol use of people with and without mental disorders, while cannabis was often used as a source of pleasure by people with and without mental disorders. The type of harm these substances were perceived to cause was also found to differ considerably.

Very few differences between the attitudes and perceptions of people with and without mental disorders, regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis, were found. However, among people with mental disorders specifically, mental health and substance use were perceived to interact. Anti-substance use campaigns were perceived to be ineffective by people both with and without mental disorders. Attitudes and perceptions towards tobacco, alcohol and cannabis were also found to differ between people with a psychotic disorder and people experiencing depression.

The findings of this research add considerably to our understanding of the attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use held among

people with mental disorders. The findings also suggest that it may be important to tailor intervention and prevention strategies regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis by substance type and perhaps type of mental disorder.

## Overview

This thesis investigates the attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among people with and without mental disorders. It is composed of an introduction, five papers and a final chapter providing a synthesis of the results and conclusions. At the time of submission four of the five papers have been accepted for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

The **Introduction** provides an overview of the major health problem of co-occurring substance use and mental disorders. It provides a rationale as to why it is important to investigate the attitudes and perceptions of people with and without mental disorders regarding substances and outlines the previous research that has been conducted in this area.

**Paper 1**, '*Attitudes and perceptions towards substances among people with mental disorders: A systematic review*' (Thornton, Baker, Johnson, & Lewin, in press) describes a systematic review of published literature investigating attitudes and perceptions towards tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among people with mental disorders. The review identified a number of gaps and weaknesses in the current literature. It found that very few studies have investigated attitudes and perceptions among people with mental disorders, other than psychotic disorders, and few studies have compared attitudes and perceptions between people with and without mental disorders and between people with different types of mental disorders. No papers investigating the perceived harmfulness or knowledge of substances were identified and many papers did not report their results separately for different substances. Additionally, the review found the methodological quality of the included studies to be

relatively low. This paper has been accepted for publication in *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*.

**Paper 2** '*Reasons for substance use among people with psychotic disorders: Method triangulation approach*' (Thornton, Baker, Johnson, & Lewin, 2012a) and **Paper 3** '*Perceptions of anti-smoking public health campaigns among people with psychotic disorders*' (Thornton, Baker, Johnson, & Kay-Lambkin, 2011) describe a study of attitudes and perceptions regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis among people with psychotic disorders. This study employed a mixed method design eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data via self-report questionnaires and semi-structured telephone interviews. *Paper 2* investigated reasons for substance use among people with psychotic disorders and is only the second study known to investigate reasons for tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use separately and simultaneously among people with mental disorders. It found reasons for tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use to differ significantly. This paper has been published in *Psychology of Addictive Behaviours*. *Paper 3* investigated perceptions of public health campaigns regarding tobacco use among people with psychotic disorders and is the first known to investigate exposure, acceptability and attitudes towards anti-tobacco public health campaigns among people with mental disorders. The paper found anti-tobacco campaigns were perceived to be relatively ineffective. This paper has been published in *Mental Health and Substance Use: Dual Diagnosis*.

**Paper 4** '*Reasons for substance use among people with mental disorders*' (Thornton et al., 2012b) describes a study which investigated reasons for tobacco, alcohol and cannabis use among people with depression or a psychotic disorder. The study combined reasons for substance use data from five randomised controlled trials of treatments for co-occurring substance use and is one of the first studies to compare

reasons for substance use between people with different mental disorders. Patterns of reasons for substance use were found to differ between people with depression and people with psychotic disorders. This paper has been published in Addictive Behaviours.

**Paper 5** '*Attitudes and perceptions of people with and without mental disorders regarding tobacco, alcohol and cannabis*' (Thornton, Johnson, Baker, & Kay-Lambkin, in submission) describes a qualitative study that investigated attitudes and perceptions of people with a psychotic disorder, current symptoms of depression or without a mental disorder. This study employed a semi-structured interview schedule that allowed issues important to the participants to be raised. Among people with and without mental disorders, five superordinate themes were identified: the social place of substance use; substance use to achieve positive effects; health and financial impacts of substance use; control over substance use; and the importance yet ineffectiveness of anti-substance use campaigns. Among people with mental disorders interactions between substance use and mental health was also an important issue raised. This paper was submitted to Qualitative Health Research (June, 2012).

The **Discussion** section of this thesis draws together, and synthesizes the results of the five included papers. The main findings of this thesis are discussed and resulting recommendations for the development of effective and appropriately targeted intervention and prevention strategies for co-occurring substance use and mental disorders are outlined.