

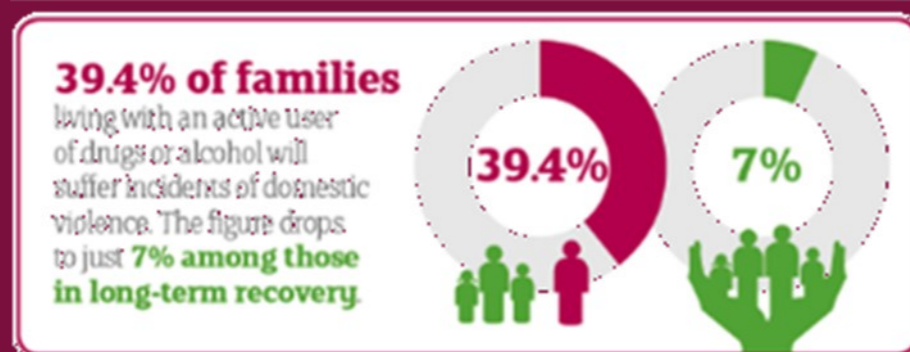
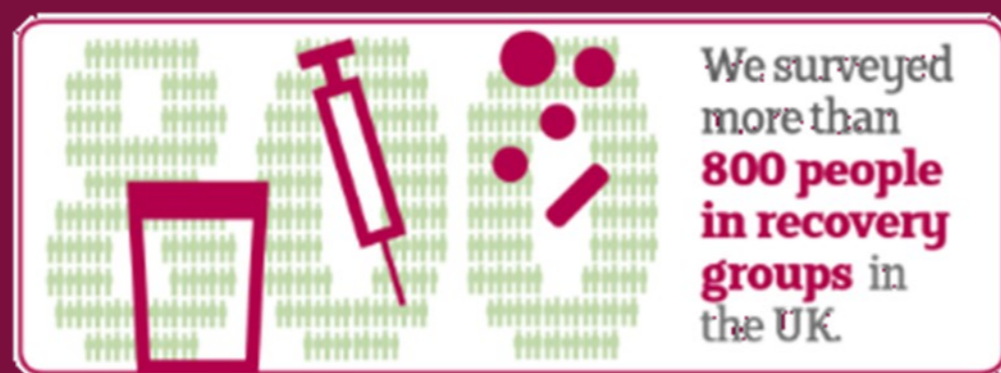
UK Life in Recovery Survey 2015

The first national UK survey of addiction recovery experiences

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Professor David Best, Dr Katherine Albertson, Dr Jamie Irving, Dr Carly Lightowlers,
Adam Mama-Rudd and Alex Chaggar

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Heart of the Campus Building
Collegiate Crescent
Collegiate Campus
Sheffield
S10 2BQ

shu.ac.uk/dlc
dlc@shu.ac.uk
[@SHULawCrim](https://twitter.com/SHULawCrim)





UK Life in Recovery Survey 2015

The cost of active addiction in England alone is estimated to be an annual £21 million pounds (Government Alcohol Strategy, 2012, p 3). Included in this estimate are NHS, industry and criminal justice system costs, but none reflecting the human costs on families, social networks and communities. These calculations also do not include the economic and intangible benefits of addiction recovery in the areas of quality of life for individuals and their families and to communities where recovery can mean regeneration and revitalisation accompanied by hope and cohesion.

In 2012, the US recovery advocacy organisation, Faces and Voices of Recovery (FAVOR) published the findings of an online survey of people in recovery from addictions to measure the changes in a range of aspects of their wellbeing from the time of their active use and into their recovery status that made an initial attempt to quantify these gains. In 2015, the Australian Life in Recovery survey built on these findings showing similar gains in a diverse range of domains for people making the transition from addiction to recovery. This report presents the findings from the first national UK survey of addiction recovery experiences.

Method

The UK survey has made only minor amendments to the questionnaires used in the US and Australia; and to the process for collating responses but essentially we have retained as much of the US and Australian survey as possible to allow comparisons across the three countries.

As in the Australia and the US, the primary method of distributing the UK Life in Recovery 2015 survey was through providing a web-link to a Survey Monkey version. This link was distributed to a wide range of recovery groups and communities across the UK. In addition, the link was hosted on social media sites, shared and retweeted. Replicating the Australian method, hard copies were also produced and distributed to facilitate participation for those who did not have access to or were not comfortable completing the online version.

These findings are a result of the analysis of 802 completed UK Life in Recovery 2015 surveys collected between March and June 2015 - a huge achievement and a major contribution to what we understand about recovery in the UK.

Key findings / results

- The positive impact of recovery on families is demonstrated by marked reductions in children being taken into care between active addiction and recovery; while stable recovery (five years or more in recovery) sees dramatic growth in reunification with children returning from care to their families. While 119 children were taken into child protection during active addiction, 70 children were successfully reunited with their families during their recoveries



- Rates of domestic violence (defined as either being a victim or perpetrating) drop dramatically from 39% for those in active addiction to less than 7% for those in recovery
- The positive impact of recovery on the UK economy is highlighted with 74% of those in recovery reporting steady employment, 18% started their own business when in recovery and 80% furthered their education or training in recovery
- Recovery results in reduced engagement with both chronic and acute healthcare services - frequent emergency room services dropped from 39% in active addiction to under 5% in recovery
- The positive impact of recovery on the UK's criminal justice sector is demonstrated by lower arrest and imprisonment rates - 58% reported being arrested in active addiction; 3% in recovery. The longer one maintains successful recovery, the less likely they are to come into contact with the criminal justice services
- Recovery also has a positive effect on the local community, as 79.4% of survey respondents reported volunteering in community or civic groups since the start of their recovery journey. This compares to 42% of the general public (according to an Institute for Volunteering survey in 2014-15) suggesting that people in recovery are twice as likely to volunteer as other members of the public
- The survey provides evidence that longer periods in recovery are associated with a range of personal and societal benefits particularly beyond the first year of recovery
- There were less gains across life domains for those on medication-assisted recovery, and for those experiencing persevering emotional and mental health problems
- Different experiences of recovery were reported in the survey findings by gender, as men and women described consistently qualitatively different recovery experiences

Key conclusions

The basic message of the UK Life in Recovery survey 2015, as with its international predecessors, is that people can and do recover from addictions, and when they do the transformation in the quality of life is a dramatic one. This results in substantial and shows clear and positive consequences for individuals, families, communities and societies. The UK Life in Recovery survey provides further evidence that there is a sizeable recovery population who are available to participate in research projects that aim to advance the cause of recovery, and that this group can be accessed and have an important story to tell.

Key implications

While UK policy has increasingly adopted a recovery perspective, this has been based on limited empirical evidence. This survey, building on those findings in the US and Australia, provides further evidence that recovery is possible and that individuals can not only overcome the mire of addictive lifestyles, but in doing so become valuable and positive contributors in society.

The message for policy-makers is clear - to support meaningful pathways to recovery not only through treatment but through access to houses and jobs, and to continue to support reintegration efforts through challenging stigma and exclusion. For those who also have mental health problems there are additional challenges as is the case for those on medication assisted recovery, but the message to practitioners and policy-makers is that this challenge should be addressed collectively and consistently through professional support and community engagement.

Women spend an average of **17.7 years** addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Men spend **22.4 years** addicted.



74% of people in long-term recovery have remained steadily employed during their recovery, compared to **40.3% in active addiction**



60% in active addiction reported getting arrested during this time **2.9% of those in long-term recovery** reported being arrested.



79.4% of people in long-term recovery have volunteered since beginning their recovery journey.

