

## Deadliest drugs

### *A lesson idea for 'Big Picture: Addiction'*

This lesson idea uses infographics about the number of drug deaths and media reports to spark debate and discussion. We have suggested some questions you could ask students and some potential answers.

This lesson idea is based on two infographics: [Deadliest Drugs](#) and [Deadliest Drugs II](#).

Looking at 'Deadliest Drugs II':

1. Can you describe the relationship between the deaths per 10,000 users and the number of press reports?

There is no clear relationship. Some drugs that have a high number of deaths per 10,000 users have very few press reports; some have a high number of deaths per 10,000 users and a lot of press coverage. A wider discussion could be had around why this bias may exist – perhaps due to the particular demographic groups that use different drugs.

2. Looking at the numbers under the “deaths per 10,000 users” heading, which substance would you say is the most risky to take?

Methadone has the highest number of deaths per 10,000 users. One reason it may appear to have the highest risk is that users of methadone may have a more sustained and chronic habit.

3. If you rely on the number of press reports, rather than the number of deaths per 10,000 users, which substance might you think is the most risky?

Cocaine has the most press reports and so you may think that this is the most risky substance.

4. Look at the 'Deadliest Drugs' graphic. The number of deaths due to alcohol poisoning in 2008 is actually very high at 685 (second out of all these substances). However, 'Deadliest Drugs II' shows a relatively low number of deaths per 10,000 users of alcohol. Why is this?

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

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# BigPicture

A lot of people use alcohol safely and so the overall number of users is a lot more than some of the other substances. The number of people who die from alcohol is 'diluted out' by the large number who use the drug without dying from it.

**5. Alcohol also has one of the lowest percentages of deaths reported – why do think this might be?**

A lot of people consume alcohol so there may be less interest in covering deaths related to alcohol poisoning. Unlike some of the other drugs listed, alcohol is legal. Stories about illegal substances may attract more media attention than those about legal ones.

**6. Politicians have discussed raising the price of alcohol in an attempt to reduce the levels of illness and death caused by this drug – [see this BBC article](#), for instance. Do you think that we should set a minimum price per unit of alcohol?**

Arguments for this may include the potential to decrease the number of deaths caused by alcohol poisoning and to lessen the burden on the NHS of treating patients suffering from alcohol-related conditions. Arguments against this include the extra cost to people who consume alcohol sensibly, and the strain that this would put on the drinks manufacturers.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

You may have noticed that the data used in this exercise is from 2008. Why do you think it is so difficult to collect accurate data about drug use and related deaths?

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