

“WON’T SOMEBODY THINK ABOUT THE CHILDREN?” AOD MORAL PANICS

Bright, S. J.^{1, 2, 3}

1. Peninsula Health
2. Curtin University
3. Psychedelic Research in Science and Medicine

Introduction / Issues: Over the past century there have been various moral panics related to the use of AODs. Most recently there has been concern regarding the emergence of Novel Psychoactive Substances and an ice ‘epidemic’. These panics are framed within dominant discourses that limit what can be thought, said and written about the drug of concern.

Method / Approach: An analysis of the dominant discourses within which recent moral panics have been framed was conducted to better understand the interface between media, policy and drug-related harm.

Key Findings: Recent moral panics have followed a similar timeline. Initially, alternative media outlets highlight the availability of a drug within neo-liberal discourse. Then concerns regarding dangers associated with the drug begin to emerge that are framed within medical and moral discourses. In doing so, the drug is constructed as having significant pathogenic agency by various actors from institutions that have authority within these discourses, and often a vested interest in perpetuating the panic. In order to maintain public confidence, governments are required to quickly demonstrate that they are able to counter to the perceived issue. This results in reactive responses that involve actions including legislative changes, funding opportunities or the establishment of taskforces.

Discussions and Conclusions: While moral panics increase the status of AOD-related problems, they limited the conversations that can occur regarding the drug of concern. In doing so, myths and stereotypes are favoured over empirical evidence. In turn, this leads to political reactivity rather than evidence-based responses.