Reviewer's report

Title: Validating estimates of problematic drug use in England

Version: 1 Date: 24 November 2006

Reviewer: George S Yacoubian

Reviewer's report:

General

1) How can "problematic" drug use be defined as "current use" of OP, CRK, or BENZOS? Is it the type of drug that is making it problematic or the recency of use? If the former, what about powder cocaine or marijuana? If the latter, how are you defining current use? is it use within the past 3 or 30 days, or a certain number of days used within the past 30 days? This definitional tautology is a major impediment.

2) There have been several studies in the US that have attempted to estimate treatment need. A more thorough literature review is advised, from both intellectual and policy reasons.

3) The authors state that the British and Scottish Crime Survey indicated 250,000 users of OP/COC in the general population in the previous year. What does "in the previous year" mean? Does this refer to the year the data were collected or a 12-month time frame for use?

4) While no drug treatment or involvement with law agencies makes drug use less problematic, it is certainly not "non-problematic."

5) Response rate is very low, and there is no indication what the original participation rate and what additional responses were acquired via the follow-up.

6) The paragraph describing Table 2 indicates that 73% expressed an opinion about their DAT estimate. Shouldn't this be 77%?

7) Reporting textual information for fewer than 10 respondents is meaningless.

8) The biggest problem with this paper is the usefulness of the findings. I do not think that the methods are particularly solid. Moreover, I don't see what the results provide to local policymakers, much less an academic audience.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

1) Replace "since" with "because." Since is a reference for time (e.g., since the 1990s), and is not explanatory.

2) Several grammatical errors throughout.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

What next?: Reject because scientifically unsound

Level of interest: An article of insufficient interest to warrant publication in a scientific/medical journal

Quality of written English: Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.