



Throughout modern history, addictions, in particular alcoholism, have been used to stigmatise “inferior” classes or people(s), including indigenous populations, and to discredit their social and national aspirations; currently this stigma still continues to exist, covering addicts as well as addiction treatment, and leads to serious health inequalities across social classes, peoples and countries

addictions  
 health inequalities  
**stigma**  
 social justice  
 discrimination

Since the concept of social justice has become legitimised in political thought and through revolutionary practice, it has not been rare to use the blame of addictions to justify the exclusion from the principles of social justice of those individuals, social classes, nations and ethnic minorities who allegedly “do not deserve it” due to their apparent or real excessive alcohol and/or drug consumption. The blame of addiction petrifies existing inequalities, including the unfair distribution of power, wealth and access to health.

Abstaining from some addictive substances or their controlled use became a symbol of moral superiority legitimising the existing social order, a superior position of the ruling classes, justifying harsh measures to control lower classes, and eventually discrediting claims of apparently inferior classes and ethnic and other minorities for more social justice, as well as social and/or national emancipation.

Attempts to remove moral stigma on addictions by their medicalisation proved to be successful only partially. People suffering from addictions experience discrimination in the labour market, as well as limited access to appropriate health services, which leads to serious health inequalities across social classes, peoples and countries. In particular, the consumers of drugs declared as illicit suffer not only discrimination in the health and social services, but their discrimination is reinforced by the criminal justice system.

## READ MORE

Moskalewicz, J., Klingemann J. (2015) Addictive substances and behaviours and social justice. in: Anderson P., Rehm J., Room R. (Ed.) *Impact of Addictive Substances and Behaviours on Individual and Societal Well-being*. Oxford University Press, 7: 143-160.

Powers, M and R Faden. (2008) *Social Justice: The Moral Foundations of Public Health and Health Policy*. Reprinted from New York: Oxford University Press. Kindle edition.

Corrigan, PW, Watson, AC, Byrne, P, and KE Davis (2005) *Mental illness stigma: problem of public health or social justice?* *Social Work* 50: 363-8

Room R. (2005) *Stigma, social inequality and alcohol and drug use*. *Drug and Alcohol Review* 24: 143-155.

Gusfield, JR. (1986) *Symbolic crusade. Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.