

# How do drug treatment courts understand addiction in Australia? A Victorian case study

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## Project overview

Drug Treatment Courts (DTCs) were developed in the United States (US) in the late 1980s as a response to the perceived ineffectiveness of traditional criminal justice responses to AOD-related problems. Over the past 20 years DTCs have begun to emerge across the world, including Australia, where the model continues to gain popularity.

DTCs aim to address the perceived association between crime and alcohol and other drug (AOD) use by providing individuals experiencing AOD 'dependence' or 'addiction' with intensive, supervised treatment.

Most available research on DTCs is quantitative in nature and centres on exploring the effectiveness of DTCs in reducing AOD use and recidivism. Little qualitative work has critically interrogated the assumptions that underpin court practices in relation to AOD addiction.

This project aims to investigate how concepts of addiction are constructed in an Australian DTC and to explore the repercussions for both individual DTC participants and public understandings of addiction.



## Program objectives

- To investigate how concepts of addiction are produced and enacted in an Australian drug treatment court (DTC);
- To investigate how DTC participants accommodate, resist or otherwise engage with conceptualisations of addiction in their DTC experiences;
- To explore how the relationship between crime and addiction is conceptualised and established in a DTC setting;
- To contribute to the academic literature about the operation of DTCs, and their implications for official and public understandings of addiction concepts; and
- To inform and improve the provision of court-ordered AOD treatment.

## Research methods

The proposed research involves a combination of methods: observational analysis and qualitative interviewing. Additionally, I will analyse general materials the Victorian DTC uses to present itself including: policy documents, information given to participants and evaluations.

## Observational analysis

The first component of the project involves filed observation of Victorian Drug Court proceedings.

- The observation component will provide an opportunity to see first-hand the nature and operation of the court. In this component of the project, I shall examine how the DTC operationalises ideas of AOD use, addiction and crime and how addiction is constituted in practice.
- This component will also involve observations of case conferences, reviews, termination hearings and graduations, with a specific focus on how addiction is defined, diagnosed and treated.

## In depth semi-structured interviews

I will conduct 20 interviews face to face with stakeholders in the Victorian DTC, including contributors to the establishment of the Victorian DTC, DTC personnel and past and current DTC participants.

## Data analysis

- NVIVO 10
- Interactive model
- Thematic and content analysis
- Data coding

## Project Timeline

	Review literature	Liaise with DTC	Submit candidacy and HREC	Write Literature review chapter	Write theory and method chapter	Begin observations of DTC processes	Interviews with DTC participants and stakeholders	Review Lit review and theory and method chapters	Analyse data from interviews	Write Interview & observations data chapters (2)	Analyse data from observations	Write observations & interviews data chapters (3)	Write conclusion and complete thesis manuscript	Publications & submit thesis
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Nov-14														
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## Australian DTCs

The first Australian DTC opened its doors in New South Wales in 1999, followed by Queensland in 2000, South Australia in 2000, Western Australia in 2001, Victoria in 2002, the Northern Territory in 2003, Tasmania in 2007.

However, incoming state and territory governments abolished both the Queensland and the Northern Territory DTCs in 2012 (Freiberg, Batagol, & Hyams, 2014).

## Addiction in DTCs

- One of the main conceptual logics underpinning DTCs is the notion that crime associated with AOD use is often the product of addiction.
- Despite the central role addiction plays in DTCs, the way in which it is conceptualized has received little critical attention.
- Studies concerned with addiction in DTCs have been conducted in the US and Canada, and none have yet been undertaken in Australia.
- Critical qualitative literature on Australian DTCs is scant.

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Social Studies of Addiction Concepts  
 Research Program



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