



**Bruce Alexander** is a psychologist and Professor Emeritus at Simon Fraser University, Canada, where he has worked since 1970. His primary research interest has been the psychology of addiction. He is best known in the UK and the US for the 'Rat Park' experiments, which helped to demonstrate the falsity of the outworn belief that simple exposure to narcotic drugs can cause addiction. In Canada, he has been well known as a critic of the 'War on Drugs' for decades. His most recent work has been on the causes of the current worldwide proliferation of addiction, not only to drugs, but to a great variety of other habits and pursuits. Exploring this topic has required that he venture far beyond his training in psychology, particularly into the fields of history and anthropology. He is married, with four children and two grandchildren.

*'For most of modern history, scientific investigations into the nature of addiction have been dominated either by pharmacological fundamentalism – the evil is caused by malevolent molecules – or by genetics and neuroscience, which situate addiction in the biology and brain of the individual. Yet despite decades of such research, a "cure" for addiction and even a comprehensive understanding of it have remained elusive. Bruce Alexander's The Globalisation of Addiction is a work of dazzling erudition that provides the missing pieces. It advances an emerging paradigm in which drug use and drug problems are understood in their full historical, cultural, and social-structural context. If we really want to know where our drug problems come from and what can be done about them, we have to move beyond a failed war on drugs and delve into the very nature of modern society. This great book shows us how to do that.'*

**Craig Reinman, Professor of Sociology and Legal Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz, co-author of Cocaine Changes: The Experience of Using and Quitting and Crack in America: Demon Drugs and Social Justice**

*'Generously conceived and meticulously researched, The Globalization of Addiction is an essential compendium of fact, theory and analysis on the international malaise of drug addiction. Prof. Bruce Alexander's discussion of the history of addiction, its sources, characteristics, political and economic ramifications and its potential resolutions is intellectually invigorating and serves as a forthright call to action. Everyone seriously interested in understanding the modern plague of substance dependence will benefit from reading this volume, a deeply original work that challenges the cherished assumptions of policy makers in London, Washington, Ottawa and in many capitals around the world.'*

**Gabor Maté M.D., author of In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction**

*'This is a refreshing, iconoclastic view of addiction. It puts the subject within an unusually wide frame that includes the way society is structured and the world views that we all live by. It makes conventional views of addiction look narrow and inadequate. Not everyone will agree with Alexander's thesis, but everyone in the addiction field should read this book and have a position on it.'*

**Jim Orford, Emeritus Professor of Clinical & Community Psychology, The University of Birmingham**

*'In The Globalisation of Addiction, Bruce Alexander has given us a remarkable gift. In addition to being extremely well-written and erudite, it both organizes an impossibly complex topic – addiction – and defines the cultural malaise (which Alexander labels "dislocation") that is at the root of what ails our modern world. Combining laboratory and clinical research with social and economic analysis, Alexander also delves into the lives of individual addicts, historical figures from St. Augustine to Adolph Eichmann, and his own life and the lives of people in his social milieu. A recurrent major stop in this journey involves decisively illuminating forays into the city of Vancouver, its native and immigrant populations, and the artistic resurgence of its inner city. Bruce Alexander makes clear that the solution for the ever-spreading scourge of modern addiction lies not in the laboratory or the clinic, but in revolutionary change of the social and economic world we inhabit.'*

**Stanton Peele, Senior Fellow, Drug Policy Alliance, Author of Love and Addiction, 7 Tools to Beat Addiction, and Addiction-Proof Your Child.**

*'This fascinating, insightful and scholarly book provides a unique and very personal overview of the "addiction field." Bruce Alexander has produced a panoramic perspective on "addiction" from his own extensive academic experience as a psychologist, together with the vast international literature on this expanding subject. As he notes, "addiction" includes a wide range of behaviours apart from the chronic use of legal and illegal mind-influencing drugs. Addiction is considered from a historical perspective and as a "societal" rather than an individual, phenomenon. Nevertheless, the role of the individual, either as an "addict", therapist or other actor in the addiction arena, is fully acknowledged. Much of the argument of this excellent book is presented from a global perspective. Even so, a sense of reality and immediacy is provided by discussion set in the City of Vancouver. This fills the role of a prototype or case study, illustrating some of the author's key general points about the historical development of addiction, together with the relevance of the global market in drugs and other addiction-related factors. He considers a wide range of issues underlying the worldwide spread of addictive behaviours. These include addiction as a response to social dislocation, the mythology of powerful "demon drugs" and the ideology of spiritual and other treatment approaches. He takes issue with many aspects of the "conventional wisdom" about addiction. Whether one agrees with him or not, this is challenging and thought-provoking.'*

**Martin Plant, Professor of Addiction Studies, University of the West of England, Bristol**

**Maira Plant, Professor of Alcohol Studies, University of the West of England, Bristol**

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The Globalisation of  
**Addiction**

Alexander



# The Globalisation of Addiction

## A STUDY IN POVERTY OF THE SPIRIT

Bruce K. Alexander



*The Globalisation of Addiction* presents a radical rethink of the nature of addiction.

Scientific medicine has failed to bring addiction under control. There are no reliable methods to cure it, prevent it, or take the pain out of it. There is no durable consensus on what addiction is, what causes it, or what should be done about it. Meanwhile, it continues to increase around the world. This book argues that the cause of this failure to control addiction is that the conventional wisdom of the 19th and 20th centuries focused too single-mindedly on the afflicted individual addict. Although addiction obviously manifests itself in individual cases, its prevalence differs dramatically between societies. For example, it can be quite rare in a society for centuries, and then become common when a tribal culture is destroyed or a highly developed civilization collapses. When addiction becomes commonplace in a society, people become addicted not only to alcohol and drugs, but to a thousand other destructive pursuits, like money, power, dysfunctional relationships, or video games. A social perspective on addiction does not deny individual differences in vulnerability to addiction, but it removes them from the foreground of attention, because social determinants are more powerful.

This book shows that the social circumstances that spread addiction in a conquered tribe or a failing civilisation are also built into today's globalising free-market society. A free-market society is magnificently productive, but it subjects people to irresistible pressures towards individualism and competition, tearing rich and poor alike from the close social and spiritual ties that normally constitute human life. People adapt to their dislocation by finding the best substitutes for a sustaining social and spiritual life that they can, and addiction serves this function all too well.

The book argues that the most effective response to a growing addiction problem is a social and political one, rather than an individual one. Such a solution would not put the doctors, psychologists, social workers, policemen, and priests, who have served with such dedication, out of work, but it would incorporate their practices in a larger social project. The project is to reshape society with enough force and imagination to enable people to find social integration and meaning in everyday life. Then great numbers of people would no longer need to fill their inner void with addictions.