



Alcohol Is More Lethal Than Heroin and Cocaine?

A study in the British Journal *Lancet* touched off headlines here in America. It claimed that alcohol is more lethal than heroin and cocaine.

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Members of the Independent Scientific Committee on Drugs, including two specialists, met in an interactive workshop to compare 20 drugs on 16 criteria: nine related to damages each

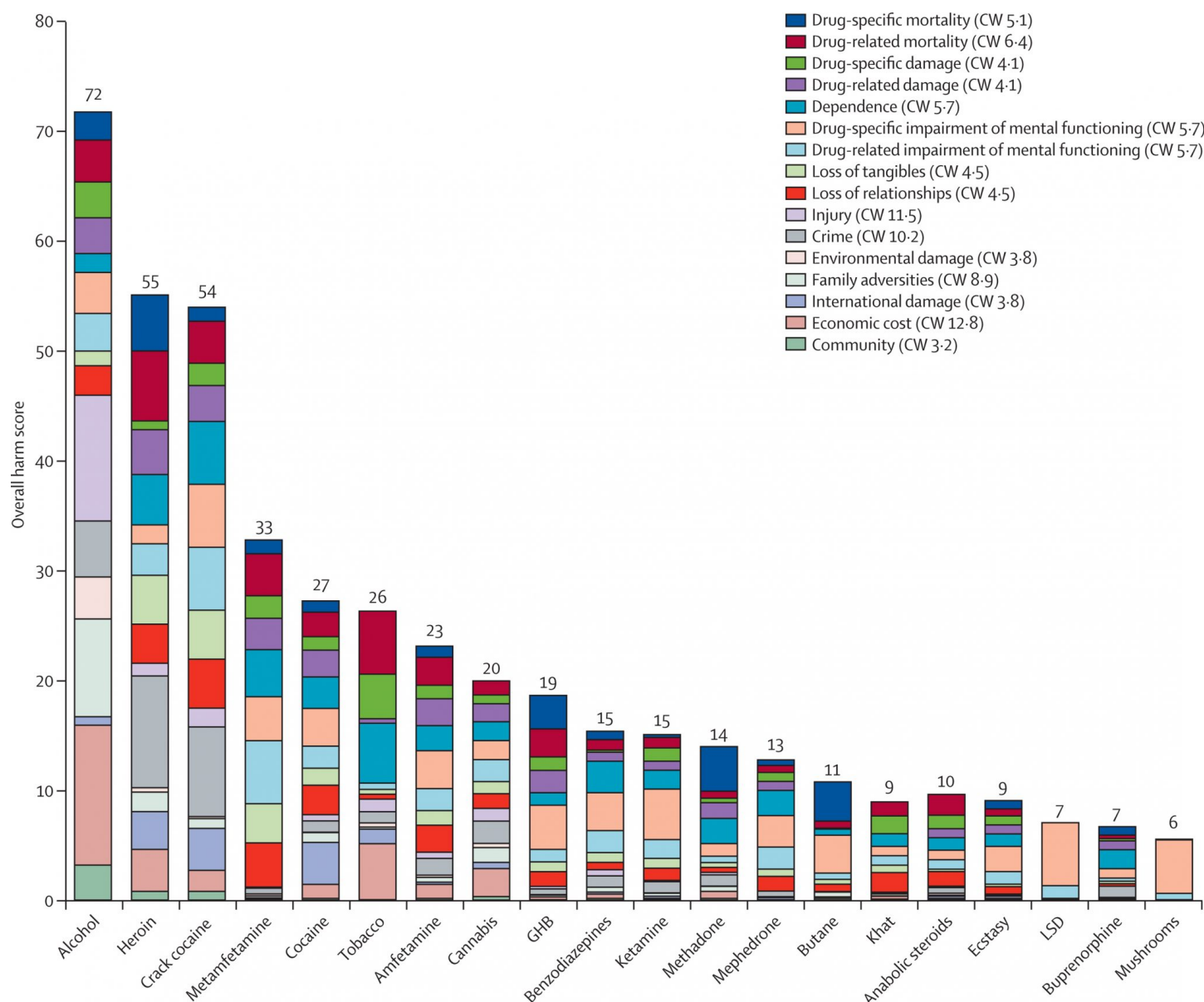
drug produces in the individual and seven to the injuries to others. Drugs were scored with weighting system to indicate relative importance of the criteria. The maximum score was 100 points.

Drug Harms in the UK: A Multicriteria Decision Analysis Methods

Using a multicriteria decision analysis (MCDA) alcohol was the most harmful drug with a score of 72. This was in large part because it was the most harmful drug to others. Heroin, the second most dangerous drug scored a 55.

This study looked not just at individual health, but societal costs, deterioration of family life, and the expense on the health care system in Britain. Alcohol also rated higher on this scale because those who use alcohol are more likely to use a variety of drugs. The authors note that even though alcohol is the most harmful drug to society and the individual, it is legal and therefore treated differently by the law.

Overall weighted scores for each of the drugs



The colored bars indicate the part scores for each of the criteria. The key shows the normalized weight for each criterion. A higher weight indicates a larger difference between the most harmful drug on the criterion and no harm. CW=cumulative weight. GHB=γ hydroxybutyric acid. LSD=lysergic acid diethylamide. The cumulative affect is why these professionals felt that alcohol is more lethal than the other drugs tested.

Research In Action

Don't ignore problem drinking. Parents sometimes feel that because they may have used alcohol before age 21, they do not have the ability to expect abstinence in their children. [Teens use alcohol](#) in very different ways than parents did a generation ago. They have shifted using alcohol from imitating occasional-drinking adult alcohol behaviors to using alcohol strictly to become highly intoxicated.

If you worry that your teenager might be using alcohol or any drug in a problematic way, call today for an [assessment](#).