



**University of
Zurich** ^{UZH}

Department of Economics – Neuroeconomics Seminar

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What opioids do and why they are overrated

Over the past decade, my lab has focused on understanding how endogenous and exogenous opioids shape our experiences of and behaviours related to rewards and punishments. A major conclusion from our own work and from probing the human opioid psychopharmacology literature is that opioids are overrated in a number of ways:

- 1) opioid drugs do not consistently induce pleasure
- 2) opioid drugs do not consistently reduce stress
- 3) opioid blockade does not consistently increase pain
- 4) opioid blockade does not consistently worsen mood
- 5) When the above effects are observed, they are typically small

A large proportion of the population is treated with opioids every year, e.g. after even minor surgery. I argue that the ways in which opioids are overrated can lead to problematic outcomes such as under-management of pain and over-management of e.g. stress. In sum, we urgently need a better understanding of the effects of these drugs and the functions of the underlying endogenous system. Importantly, even when the subjective effects are inconsistent, there may be reliable and measurable changes in behaviour that provide some support for the importance of endogenous and exogenous opioids for human pleasure and punishment.