

# Qualitative exploration of the relationships between people who regularly use methamphetamine and their family and friends

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**Introduction:** The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative exploration of the current and previous relationships of people who use methamphetamine with family and friends.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 adults who regularly use methamphetamine between June and August 2023. Data were analysed using thematic analysis in NVivo. Questions were informed by Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time model and consultation with an advisory group of people with lived experience and representatives from the sector.

**Key Findings:** Although most participants initially began using methamphetamine to increase sociability, often in party environments, many participants ended up using primarily by themselves, contributing to social withdrawal. Participants felt family and friends related everything about them back to their drug use and expressed a desire to be seen as a complete person, not solely a person who uses drugs. Some participants shared detailed information about their drug use with family members and felt well-supported by them. Other participants felt judged after disclosing to family members, and some were subsequently 'cut off' by them. This placed a greater importance of close friends as 'chosen family' in participants' lives. Shared experiences of stigma were mentioned as a motivation to seek out friendships with other people who use methamphetamine, friendships that could provide a safe, accepting, and supportive space. In contrast, some participants described these relationships as primarily superficial and solely focused on drug use.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Experiences of stigma play a central role in relationships with friends and family among people who use methamphetamine. This stigma influences communication, the overall quality of these relationships, and can be a potent barrier to social support.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** Given the high levels of stigma this population experiences across different relationships, it is important to increase the understanding of drug use in society to improve social well-being and aid the provision of support for this population.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** This work was supported by an Australian Government research training program scholarship as well as an NDARC higher degree research scholarship.