

A qualitative study of families affected by a loved one's methamphetamine use: resilience processes and adaptations to adversity

Clare Rushton¹, Peter J. Kelly^{1,2}, Alison K. Beck^{1,2}, Briony Larance^{1,2}

¹*School of Psychology, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia, 2500*, ²*Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute, University of Wollongong, NSW, Australia, 2500*

Presenter's email: cr566@uowmail.edu.au

Introduction: Families affected by a loved one's methamphetamine use experience substantial harms and burden. Pathologising views of the family have been a dominant narrative in understanding families' experience, reinforcing stigma and limiting support provision and access. Using a family-resilience framework, this study aimed to identify adaptations in response to the stress and strain of supporting a loved one with methamphetamine use and explore the processes that may facilitate resilience.

Methods: The data analysed in the current qualitative study were generated by audio-recorded and transcribed semi-structured pre-treatment phone interviews from an intervention feasibility trial. Participants were English-speaking Australian residents, aged >18 years, affected by another's methamphetamine use, and interested in participating in SMART Family and Friends, delivered via video-conference. Recruitment occurred between March-October 2021 through the SMART Recovery Australia website. Interviews with twenty-four people (21 women, 3 men) were analysed by thematic analysis, aided by Iterative Categorisation. A manual of deductive codes guided analysis, with inductive codes integrated as identified in the data. Final theme development was informed by the family-resilience framework.

Key Findings: Participants identified adaptations in their belief systems in response to their loved one's methamphetamine use. Four key themes were identified: (1) acceptance and resignation (2) integration of alternative perspectives to develop a more compassionate view of addiction, (3) fostering of purpose and connection to larger values through spirituality, philanthropy, and/or re-connection with self-identity, and (4) enduring hope and a positive outlook while acknowledging ongoing challenges.

Discussions and Conclusions: Adaptations in the belief systems of families affected by a loved one's methamphetamine use may facilitate resilience.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Treatment design should consider methods that support resilience-facilitating processes, such as providing different conceptualisations of addiction to support processes of acceptance, developing an integrated understanding, and supporting re-connection with self-identify.

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