

Influences of methamphetamine use on family relationships: Interviews with family members

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Introduction: There is currently a scarcity of research exploring the influence of methamphetamine on family relationships. We conducted a qualitative study to explore the relationship dynamics between people who use methamphetamine and their family members.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews with 19 family members were conducted between June and August 2023. Data were analysed in NVivo using thematic analysis. 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: The sample comprised of nine parents, four partners, three siblings, and three friends of people who use methamphetamine. There were five broad themes in the data. In theme 1 participants describe changes in their loved ones, which they attributed to drug use. Participants often perceived that their loved one was becoming another person. Theme 2 identified tensions in the home, which then influenced family member's work performance and attendance, and their interactions with the extended family. In theme 3, participants describe navigating boundaries around changing family dynamics, their concerns for the person using methamphetamine's well-being and a desire to keep other family members safe. Theme 4 involves participants' appreciation of self-care and how improved communication helped to enhance their family relationships. In theme 5, participants discuss the stigma they experienced from friends and family, which prevented them from receiving social support in these relationships.

Discussions and Conclusions: Having a family member who uses methamphetamine can contribute to changes in family dynamics. These changes can, in turn, influence family members' work-life and relationships with friends and extended family. Experiences of stigma can inhibit seeking social support, which was important for participants.

Implications for Practice or Policy: These findings highlight the need to increase awareness and provide tailored support for family members of people who use methamphetamine. Offering resources on how to fight drug-related stigmas will also help to remove this barrier to support-seeking.

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.