

## **LONG-TERM PATTERNS OF HEROIN USE AND MENTAL HEALTH: FINDINGS FROM THE 18-20-YEAR FOLLOW-UP OF THE AUSTRALIAN TREATMENT OUTCOME STUDY (ATOS)**

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**Introduction and Aims:** Heroin dependence is a chronic and, in many cases, lifelong condition, associated with comorbid mental health disorders. Using data collected as part of the Australian Treatment Outcome Study, the present paper aims to examine the major findings pertaining to heroin use, comorbid disorders and treatment patterns over 18-20 years.

**Design and Methods:** 615 people with heroin dependence were recruited in 2001-2002, and re-interviewed at 3-months, 1-year, 2-years, 3-years, 11-years, and 18-20-years post-baseline (follow-up rates of 89%, 81%, 76%, 70%, 70%, 65% respectively). Heroin dependence, major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were assessed at each interview using the Composite International Diagnostic Interview v2.1 (CIDI), and heroin treatment was obtained using the timeline follow-back method.

**Key Findings:** At 18-20-years, preliminary analyses indicate that 14.5% of the cohort endorsed criteria for heroin dependence and 47.4% were in treatment for opiate dependence. One seventh of the cohort (14.2%) met criteria for current depression and 15.8% for current PTSD. The majority of the cohort (96%) had experienced a period of abstinence, with a mean period of just over 5 years. Overall, physical and mental health were poorer than population norms. Just under 18% of the cohort were deceased.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Despite significant reductions in heroin use and dependence over the 18-20-year follow-up, there were continued high rates of other comorbidities. Further, although a significant proportion of the cohort achieved continual abstinence over substantial portions of the follow-up period, findings highlight the importance of stability in treatment.