THE LIFE OF THE HEROIN USER

Typical Beginnings, Trajectories and Outcomes
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SHANE DARKE
To Skye, Jessica and Lilly.
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Foreword

This book exemplifies what the IRMA monograph series seeks to achieve in the service of its international readership. It comprehensively and critically reviews an important area of addiction research and offers conclusions of wide relevance to the policy arena. Importantly, it tells us what is unknown or uncertain as well as what is today confidently known, and it offers thinking which will help set further research agendas. This is a book which expertly and in fair-minded fashion is written exactly to meet a contemporary need.

That Shane Darke has found time to author this book despite the demands of a busy and highly productive research career puts us much in his debt. Besides due acknowledgement at the individual level and an expression of admiration toward NDARC (an Australian research centre of high international standing), I see this latest contribution to the IRMA project as speaking to the quality and maturity very generally of the enterprise which is addiction research and its claim to policy relevance.

Griffith Edwards,
Series Editor
Preface

Why write a book on the life of a heroin user? After working in the field of heroin dependence for a quarter of a century, to some extent my fellow researchers and I have grown up with the heroin epidemic. We have seen the impact that the drug makes upon lives. An enormous amount has been written about heroin use, and some excellent longitudinal studies have been conducted. No one, however, has attempted to present a complete lifecycle of heroin use. The picture of this cycle has been building up in my mind across the years. It was time to reflect on what we have learnt, and to produce a single volume that addresses issues that pertain to all aspects and stages of the heroin user’s life. In doing so I had a number of questions in mind, with answers that lay in many diverse places in the literature. What is the family background of the typical heroin user? Were their parents drug users? What are their childhood experiences, and how do they relate to later life? How do they get into drugs? Does treatment work? Do people mature out? It seemed to me that synthesising this wide-ranging literature into a single volume might have potentially enormous benefits for researchers, clinicians, relatives of users and those who simply wish to know more about this major public health problem. It is my sincere hope that readers of this book will find the answers to such questions.

It is appropriate for me to acknowledge the enormous assistance that I have received in writing this book. Firstly, the research for the book was funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Agein. On a personal level, I would like to express my great thanks to Professor Griffith Edwards, the doyen of our field, for his inspiration and support across the years. For their wonderful support of this project, I would also like to thank Kevin Barnes, Matt Berninger, David Bowie, Chiara Bucello, Kate Clowes, Jessica Darke, Lilly Darke, Louisa Degenhardt, Wayne Hall, Martin Iguchi, Mary Kumvaj, Skye McDonald, Joanne Ross, Rachel Taylor and Michelle Torok.

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