

Part I

Introduction

Chapter

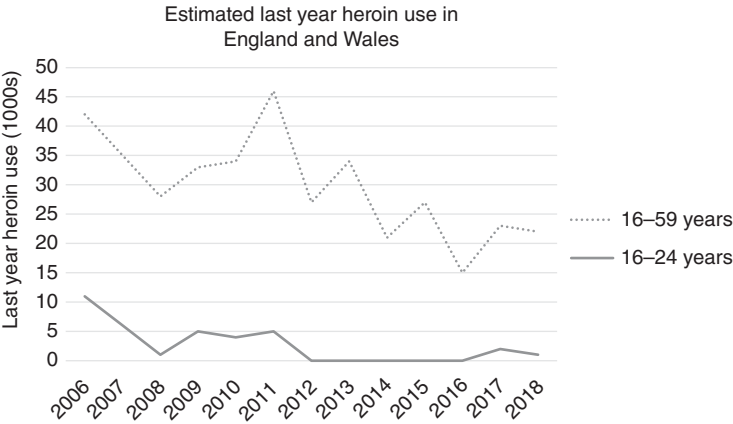
Introduction

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1.1 Why Read This Book?

Over the last decade, the UK, Europe and beyond have seen a dramatic change in the patterns of illicit drug use, particularly in adolescents and those in their twenties for whom heroin and crack cocaine have steadily lost popularity (Figure 1.1). While younger drug users continue to use established drugs such as powder cocaine and MDMA, some are attracted to a range of newly emerging drugs, including so-called club drugs and new psychoactive substances.

Worldwide, the last decade has seen an unprecedented increase in the number of substances and combinations available to users through illegal drug markets.<sup>1 2</sup>



**Figure 1.1** Estimated number of people who used heroin in the last year: 16–24 year olds vs 16–59 year olds. Crime Survey England and Wales.

Many of these emerging drugs have poorly understood harms, and as a result clinicians are often unsure of the best method(s) of clinical management. The rapid emergence of numerous new psychoactive drugs in particular is a challenge, as the research evidence to inform clinical management lags far behind the need for clinical care. This lack of evidence-based guidance leaves clinicians without sufficient support in clinical decision making and is a significant problem across the clinical front line.

*Club Drugs and Novel Psychoactive Substances: The Clinician's Handbook* is intended to provide clinicians from a range of disciplines with a concise summary of this complex emerging field. Offering advice on clinical assessment and management supported by clinical examples, this book is intended to help busy clinicians quickly gain expert knowledge and clinical competence in common clinical presentations.

As this book will clearly demonstrate, the illicit drug market is currently evolving rapidly. Established illicit drugs, newly emerging illicit drugs and non-prescribed and diverted prescription medications are all being made available, increasingly through online or social media platforms. This situation will continue to challenge clinicians for the foreseeable future.

## 1.2 Aim and Structure

This volume aims to provide clinical information to frontline clinicians in an accessible, clear and rigorous manner in order to improve knowledge and clinical competence in a rapidly emerging area. The book is structured to enable ease of use, with chapters divided by psychoactive effect. Anonymised case studies from the authors' clinical experiences are provided to illustrate key clinical issues. References are provided for those who seek further detail.

There is extensive clinical guidance available for opiate drugs such as heroin, but surprisingly little on the more commonly used 'club' drugs. This book will tackle this knowledge gap by addressing emerging novel psychoactive substances (NPS) and club drugs, including cocaine, MDMA and ketamine. In this way, the reader will gain an overview of emerging drug harms, ranging from established club drugs to the latest NPS.