

RESPONDING TO ICE USE WITHIN AN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY: FINDINGS OF A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Introduction / Issues: Ice (a potent form of methamphetamine) use can have particularly distressing effects in Aboriginal communities, where people are dealing with complex social and health issues. Regional cities seem particularly hard hit. A recent Victorian government Inquiry into ice use identified a need to explore the treatment needs of Aboriginal people and people in regional communities.

Method / Approach: We report here a collaborative qualitative research project designed to explore treatment needs and experiences of Aboriginal people in Mildura. The study involved interviews with ice users (n=14) family members of Aboriginal ice users (n=6) and workers (n=6). Interviews were analysed thematically.

Key Findings: Four key themes emerged. First, interviewees strongly believed that poverty and trauma made Aboriginal people vulnerable to problematic ice use. Second, widespread prevalence normalized ice use for some, while shame around problematic use prevented others from seeking help. Third, family members provided critical motivation to stop ice use. Users despaired when relationships with family were damaged, yet family members were overwhelmed and lacked resources to help. Finally, outlawed motorcycle gangs have aggressively marketed ice in Mildura and their activities exacerbate the fear that surrounds it.

Discussions and Conclusions: Alongside expanding local treatment options and offering treatment that is not time-limited, alongside efforts to engage and support families are critical. Providing people with 'ice free' social spaces is a major challenge. Addressing the shame that surrounds problematic ice use for families and users is also important in encouraging people to approach agencies for help.

Implications for Practice or Policy (optional): Services should support families wherever possible and encourage community or cultural events where ice use is not acceptable. To counter the sense of hopelessness that some participants reported, it would be useful to share the stories of Aboriginal people who have stopped or reduced ice use.

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