

The nature and implications of lifestyle transitions for persistent heroin use

Background While existing research has tended to focus on specific drug user groups, the current paper explores how people who use heroin might move between such groups over time. Building on previous research that has identified types of heroin-using lifestyles (Morgan and Bennett, 2021a), we investigate the nature and extent of lifestyle transitions from one type to another. In doing so, we examine the implications that lifestyle transitions might have for drug use as well as harm-reduction strategies and treatment.

Methods The research was based on a sample of 51 people who use heroin interviewed for a study into persistent heroin use, 38 of whom provided data relating to transitions between heroin-using lifestyles.

Results Participants in the study explained changes in their lifestyles through three distinct narrative themes: grabbing onto ‘hooks for change’, ‘taking an opportunity’, and ‘losing control’. The findings also show how, through case studies, the nature and implications of lifestyle transitions can be wide ranging.

Conclusion While such explanations for change have been identified in criminological and substance use literature, they have not, to our knowledge, been used to understand changes within heroin-using careers. Further theoretical work to develop these concepts and advance understanding of persistent heroin use is encouraged, as is using these concepts to inform policy and practice.

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Introduction

Existing research on people who use heroin has tended to focus on specific named user groups studied at a point in time. Cohen (1986), for example, identified several types of people who use heroin including *'the emotionally sick addict'*, *'the normal addict'*, *'the professional criminal addict'*, *'the inadequately socialized addict'*, and *'the sensation seeking addict'*. Similarly, Nurco and Shaffer (1982) produced a typology of males who use heroin in the United States who were grouped into: 'successful criminals', 'street addicts', 'losers', 'working addicts', 'conservative addicts', and 'moochers' (a beggar or scrounger). Such findings might suggest that user groups are long-lasting and that users remain in their groups for extended periods of time. However, there is some evidence that users do not necessarily remain in a single-user group for life, but either terminate heroin use (Maruna, 2001) or move on to another possibly quite different user group (Faupel, 1991).

This observation is important as it has been suggested that lifestyles might be related to heroin consumption and associated harms (Morgan and Bennett, 2021a). In other words, changes in lifestyle might have implications for heroin use, and changes in heroin use might have implications for lifestyles. It is important, therefore, to clarify more fully the

¹ The terms 'addict' and 'junkie' are seen as stigmatising but are regularly found in older studies of heroin use. When reviewing some aspects of this literature use of the word cannot be avoided. This is done without the intention of reproducing stigma.

roles that lifestyles play in relation to patterns of persistent heroin use and associated harms.

Defining Lifestyles:

‘Lifestyle’ is a term that is used in common parlance and can be found in sociological, psychological, and criminological literature. Criminologists have viewed lifestyle in terms of routine activities (Hindelang et al., 1978), criminal opportunities, and risk of victimisation (Cohen and Felson, 1978). Nurco et al. (1981) offered a definition of lifestyle as ‘the constellation of behaviours centred around the various ways in which individuals define and pursue their central life interests’ (p.1306). Walters (1994), also writing about drug users’ lifestyles but from a psychological perspective, defined lifestyle in terms of temperament, cognition and decision making. In the field of sociology, Weber (2019) conceptualised lifestyle through people’s life choices and the structural factors that affected their life chances. Having seen how definitions and usage of the lifestyle concept vary, it is useful to review relevant studies.

Typologies of Heroin-Using Lifestyles:

In this section, we identify what is known about the relationship between lifestyle and heroin use by reviewing relevant typologies. Lifestyle is conceived here as a combination of daily activities, physical or social environments, psychological orientation, and general life interests.

Cohen (1986) produced a psycho-social typology of people who use heroin based on psychiatric diagnoses and psychological evaluations, that were closely related to lifestyle. Cohen's (1986) descriptions of the types included aspects of lifestyle including criminality and time spent living on the streets. The implication of the paper is that psychological variables help to predict aspects of lifestyle. During the 1980s a clutch of studies (Nurco et al., 1981, 1989, Nurco and Schaffer, 1982, Shaffer et al., 1984) used quantitative methods to categorise the lifestyles of people who use heroin with a focus on criminal behaviours. The studies collected data cross-sectionally and did not discuss the possibility of people moving from one type to another. It should also be noted that these studies did not aim for an appreciative understanding of lifestyle as they were primarily concerned with allocating drug treatment, often in the hope of reducing criminal behaviour.

Morgan and Bennett (2021a) identified four heroin-using lifestyles related to: drug use; housing; money earned; and social environment. The types of heroin-using lifestyle identified in the study were referred to as: '*Domestic Users*', who balanced persistent heroin use with a stake in conformity and stable living, '*Top Boys*' who were successful drug dealers, those living '*On the Wander*', who were part of a city-centre homeless community, and those living '*On the Run*', who were also homeless, but less involved with others and were primarily regular crack users as well as persistently using heroin. Beyond identifying these types, the authors noted certain implications of living the lifestyle types.

Bourdieu (1990, 2010) proposed a framework for understanding lifestyle. Morgan and Bennett (2021a) utilised this framework to understand heroin use across their four proposed lifestyle types, with reference to how competences were required to

persistently use heroin. Furthermore, it was shown how different sources of capital, were needed to persist across the four types of lifestyle. For example, ‘Domestic Users’ required particular social skills to pass in certain settings or deflect the stigma of heroin use (Morgan and Bennett, 2021b), while in order to live ‘On the Wander’, ‘On the Run’, or as a ‘Top boy’ a different set of street smarts were required (Morgan and Bennett, 2021a, Morgan and Silverstone, 2023). Analysis went further, using Cloud and Granfield’s (2008) concept of *recovery capital*, to speculate that some forms of capital that aided persistent heroin use might also serve to assist with desistance from heroin use.

Transitions Between Heroin-Using Lifestyles:

This section reviews literature that aligns closest to the aims of the current research, in that it concerns changes over time in the form of transitions in lifestyle among people who use heroin. The concern with changes over time relates to the career concept, that Becker (1963) used to show how the lived experience of deviance can be structured like an employment career.

The literature reviewed in this section shows the way in which people who use heroin experienced various kinds of transitions in lifestyles during their lifetime, including changes in social associations, housing, income, and aspects of daily routines. Stimson (1972) investigated whether there might be different types of people who use heroin. As part of his study of users attending a clinic in London, he identified four types: ‘*Stable’s*,

'*Junkies*', '*Loner's*', and '*Two-Worlders*'. The paper associated the different user types to aspects of lifestyle, such as employment, missing days off work, criminality, missing nights of sleep, regularly eating full meals rather than only snacking, and forms of risky behaviours such as unhygienic injection practices. The study asked the participants associated with the four user types how their behaviours had changed over time. The analysis found that '*Stables*' and '*Junkies*' reported consistent behaviours over time, whereas '*Loners*' reported higher levels of past criminal convictions and health complications. This meant that their past profiles were more akin to '*Junkies*', suggesting a lifestyle transition.

Faupel (1991) constructed a typology based on people who use heroin in Wilmington, Delaware. He described a four-stage process that made up the heroin career and found the following patterns: (1). '*The occasional user*' (limited heroin use, structured lifestyle); (2). '*The stable addict*' (regular heroin use, structured lifestyle); (3). '*The freewheeling addict*' (regular heroin use and high income, low levels of life structure), and (4). '*The street junkie*' (high need for heroin, limited financial resources and a weakly structured lifestyle). This analysis suggested a relationship between access to heroin, life structure, and heroin use. For instance, improved earnings or access to dealers related to an increase in heroin consumption and changes to life structure. The study presented heroin-using lifestyles as associated with the stages of a heroin using career.

The evidence is currently unclear as to the role of lifestyle in the heroin-using career. Only Faupel (1991) has unequivocally advanced the idea of lifestyle transition. In addition, Stimson (1972) suggested that one type, namely the '*Loner*' group might previously have been a member of the '*Junky*' group. However, transitions between

heroin using lifestyles might also occur with a period of desistance or occasional use in between. Studies by Waldorf (1972) and Rosenbaum (1981) reported that temporary desistance in the form of treatment were typical in the progression of heroin-using careers. Maruna (2001) used the concept of narrative identity to understand desistance from heroin use. This is relevant because desisting before later returning to heroin use, can be an instance of a lifestyle transition.

While such studies have not engaged with the concept of lifestyle, studies focusing on recovery from problematic patterns of substance use (e.g., Best, 2020, Cloud and Granfield, 2008) are of relevance due to their focus on processes of change. In the field of criminology, studies have sought to understand change, most often in relation to desistance from crime. Although a reading of these, often qualitative, studies does indicate that lifestyle change occurs alongside desistance from offending, these papers tend not to use lifestyle as an organising heuristic. Examples include the studies by Farrall (2005) and Giordano et al. (2002) which use differing theoretical frameworks to make similar points regarding structure and agency in change.

The studies reviewed have shown that although the lifestyle concept has been utilised in some literature on heroin use it has been done so in a scattering of publications, mostly published some decades ago. While lifestyle is present and occasionally defined in the available literature it has even more rarely been used as a central explanatory concept. Perhaps this relates to the inconsistency in definitions, where, for example Walters' (1994) psychological conception moved far away from Weber's (2019) more common-sense formulation of lifestyle. In addition, with some exceptions, such as Morgan and Bennett, 2021a), Moyle and Coomber (2017) and Wakeman (2016), the past decade has seen few qualitative studies of heroin use. The present study seeks give primacy to the lifestyle concept in understanding persistent heroin use and related behaviours.

Research Aims:

The current research aimed to provide a broad understanding of persistent heroin use by considering the impact of lifestyle transitions on heroin use, and associated outcomes. We were interested in focusing not only on the way in which particular lifestyles framed heroin use, but also on the impact and possible implications of the transition itself.

Methods

Data Collection:

Research interviews were conducted by James Morgan between November 2011 and June 2012 while volunteering at a local harm reduction centre where most of the interviews were conducted. Others were conducted at two nearby facilities for homeless people. Around a third of the participants were familiar with the researcher from his harm reduction activities and this helped with rapport building, however being vouched for by the well-respected managers of the project was most important in gaining trust and eliciting candid accounts from the participants.

Ethical Considerations:

As the study involved discussion of sensitive issues with potentially vulnerable participants, it was necessary to address ethical issues. Informed consent was ensured by reading a statement regarding the nature of the study which was verbally agreed to by

participants. Confidentiality was also a concern and to this end pseudonyms were used for participants and potentially identifying aspects of their interviews redacted. Recordings and transcripts were held on a secure password protected hard drive. Concerns regarding the safety of the researcher and participants were addressed by the locations of the research. The harm reduction centre and homeless' hostels were comfortable venues where professionals were close by and could have been easily summoned if needed. All aspects of the research design were agreed to by the University of South Wales ethics committee.

Research Design:

Interviews began with participants mapping their heroin using careers on graph paper before a semi structured component where they discussed their lifestyles from their advent of daily heroin use until the present day. Interviews were often participant led, however in instances where the participant was not so forthcoming, they were asked to elaborate on some aspects of their daily lives. These prompts included asking participants to talk through a typical day in their life, to discuss drug use, social associations, housing, and sources of income. If a participant struggled to identify a typical day, they were asked to remember a specific day such as a birthday, and then asked how it might differ from other days. While some participants reflected how uniform their daily lifestyles may have been, the sample overwhelmingly tended to describe regular daily routines.²

² Further information on research design, sampling and methods of analysis can be found in the related paper by Morgan and Bennett (2021a).

Respondent Selection:

While the researcher was working in the needle exchange of the harm reduction centre any service users who requested items that suggested heroin use were invited to participate in an interview with the researcher in exchange for a £10 shopping voucher. In some cases, regular visitors to the harm-reduction centre were recommended by staff as having a history of persistent heroin use. Similarly, for interviews conducted at homeless centres, residents or regular visitors were recommended by staff. Despite the focus on persistent heroin use a definition for this term was not established *a priori*, but instead developed throughout the fieldwork. However, all participants interviewed had been using heroin for at least three years and had been using daily for at least a year.

Used and not used samples:

In total 51 people who use heroin were recruited to participate in this study. The entirety of this sample was used in the analysis conducted by Morgan and Bennett (2021a), however not all participants were suitable for analysis in the current paper. Of the 51 participant interviews, nine were excluded from analysis on the grounds that it was unclear whether a lifestyle transition had been made, leaving 42 cases. Four more were excluded on the grounds that only one lifestyle was discussed, leaving 38 cases where transitions were present. Of these 38 interview participants, 10 described just one transition, 6 two transitions, 14 three transitions, 6 four transitions, 1 five transitions and 1 seven transitions. The analysis for this paper was based on these 38 interviews. In total across the 38 interviews, 100 transitions were analysed. Table 1 includes details of the total sample of 51, while Table 2 separately details the 38 who provided data regarding transitions between heroin using lifestyles.

Of the 38 participants whose transcripts were analysed for the present study, ages ranged 21 to 54 with a mean of 35.1. Thirty-four of this sample were men and four were women, 36 were white. This differed slightly from the larger sample, where of the 51 sampled, the mean age was 35.5, 9 were women and 48 white. It is not clear why more than half of the women who were sampled did not discuss transitions in their lifestyles, although this may well relate to small number of women recruited to the study overall.

“Table 1” “Table 2”

Method of Analysis:

Four types of heroin using lifestyle were identified and methods for doing so are outlined in the related paper by Morgan and Bennett (2021a). Analysis for the current paper focused on parts of the transcripts where transitions between lifestyle types were discussed. Through thematic analysis three themes to summarise transitions between heroin using lifestyles emerged. These transition themes did not relate to *a priori* theorizing, although as will be seen below, to varying the degrees, each theme resonated with existing literature. The three transition themes identified are described in the results section, however it should be noted that there were four ways in which lifestyle transition occurred:

- (1) A sudden change from one type of heroin using lifestyle to another.
- (2) A gradual move between lifestyles.
- (3) A break in heroin use followed by a different lifestyle.
- (4) A break in heroin use followed by the same type of lifestyle.

Results

The findings of this study are presented in two sections. First, themes of transition were extracted from the sample as a whole. In this section there is a focus on the phenomenon of lifestyle change and participants' explanations for how the changes occurred. Each theme is described and then illustrated with participant quotations.

Second, based on individual case studies, the impact of lifestyle transition is examined with special reference to heroin use and harms to themselves and others. In this section, case studies are used to demonstrate how lifestyle transitions occur in the context of heroin using careers. Each of the three case studies takes the form of one participant's biography. The three were selected due to the clear and detailed accounts given in their interviews and because they were exemplary of both the range of lifestyle types identified by Morgan and Bennett (2021a) and the themes of transition advanced in the current paper. In addition, they were chosen because their stories include a wide range of issues relating to the passage of time, relationships, drug treatment and the criminal justice system that were familiar across interviews and related to lifestyle change.

(1). General themes:

Our understanding of persistent heroin use includes an analysis of three distinct narrative themes. The three themes were identified by coding excerpts from parts of the transcripts that specifically concerned lifestyle transitions. The themes are grabbing onto 'hooks for change', 'taking an opportunity', and 'losing control'. These themes of transition were not universal to all participants, those who described some sort of lifestyle transition in their heroin using careers might have utilised with one, two or all three of the transition themes.

Table 3

Narratives of change that centred on the agency and efforts and the personal and social resources of the storyteller are referred to as grabbing onto ‘hooks for change’. These ‘hooks’ might manifest in social or economic capital that are used as resources in making a change from one heroin-using lifestyle to another or moving to a period of desistance from heroin use, albeit temporarily. In these stories the narrator explains the change through their agency and personal efforts made alongside resources that aided the change. An example was identified in the following excerpt. Clive shows how a combination of his own motivation, a new partner, and a methadone prescription enabled him to reduce his heroin use:

Bumped into my old mate, she was a girl, start going with her, moved in with her, and then through that I thought, hang on I need to start calming down and get a methadone script and that was when I started injecting, so, like, trying to get on it, took about 18 months to get on it...I started methadone script but still, found it hard to get off the amount of heroin.

Another example of grabbing onto ‘hooks for change’ is when *Lauren* weaned herself off heroin after her boyfriend was arrested. While her agency is clear, the importance of social capital in the form of her family life in maintaining desistance, albeit temporarily is also evident:

So, I was clucking all the time and I think I weaned myself off it because I was using less and less and less... I’ve got a little brother... and I just used to play with him all the time. I was just always with him. I just had a happier life with my family.

In other cases, participants described changes to their lifestyles simply based on ‘taking an opportunity’ presented to them. This theme differs from the one previously discussed due to the lesser emphasis on the agency of the actor. These could be accidental changes where they temporarily desisted from heroin use during a prison sentence, or when in receipt of a methadone maintenance prescription. In a different sort of a storyline, *Ben* took an easy opportunity to increase his drug use and lead a more comfortable lifestyle by becoming a drug dealer:

He said, look, you know, we’ve got a bit of a habit coming here, do you want to make yourself a bit of money, you go and do a bit of running for me, I’ll give you some money, I’ll chuck you a fifty, so that’s basically a tenth, and I’m happy.

In this story, and in other instances of ‘taking an opportunity’, although some form of capital may have assisted the transition, the emphasis is not on the agency of the narrator. In another example *Cheryl* relates reducing her heroin use to being placed on a methadone prescription as if it were something that happened to her, rather than it being the fruit of her efforts:

It was good that I was on the meth like because, if I didn’t get a bag, I didn’t have to chuck like... I had money like, if I couldn’t find a dealer like, but if I was on the meth, I was fine like, it didn’t bother me.

Changes where the storyteller explains an unwanted change to their lifestyle was referred to as ‘losing control’. Analysis of transitions between heroin using lifestyles showed that participants described changes beyond their control both in terms of their own incompetence and also in terms of being powerless in the face of unfortunate circumstances or nefarious others.

In an example of the latter process, *Ben* related his relapse to bumping into old friends from his heroin using days after moving house:

Moving in, settling in, going into town, bumping into old faces, old friends, certain people I'd given my address to.

In a second example, a participant relates change to their own loss of control as *Clive* moved from living as a *Domestic User* to living *On the Run*:

I was like...like a bit losing control like, doing constant rock use, I knew I needed more money and you, like, I was like probably, doing more. Proper withdrawn, looking scatty, like I'm, like I'm just like always in rush.

These three types of explanation for lifestyle transitions help us to understand the subjective elements of change in the lives of people who use heroin. In the following section three case studies of individual participants' biographies are introduced that contextualise how lifestyle transitions occur in heroin-using careers, and how they relate to changes in heroin use and related behaviours.

(2). Case Studies:

To understand the nature of lifestyle transitions, how they occur and their relation to positive and negative outcomes three autobiographical accounts are introduced. These stories show some of the ways that changes in lifestyle correspond with changes in drug use and related outcomes. While the case studies provide further illustration of the transition themes, they are not a logical extension of the classification scheme presented in section (1). The case studies are designed to show how lifestyle transition occurs in

the context of a heroin using career, including an eye towards the events that precede and succeed lifestyle change. While it might have been tempting to choose case studies on the basis that each would have been exemplary of one theme, this would have been misleading. Since participants often alluded to different themes of transition at different points in their heroin using careers, case studies should demonstrate this.

Both Giordano et al. (2002) and Farrall (2005) have used similar biographical case studies to present their data in studies of desistance from crime. Studies of desistance and the current paper share a focus on changes over time, and a biographical presentation of data lends itself to demonstrating such changes and their implications. While Giordano et al. (2002) first conducted a regression to show which variables might be most associated with desistance, before using a qualitative analysis to further develop their theory, Farrall's (2005) study was purely qualitative. The methods of qualitative data analysis were not described in detail in either paper. Both papers selected participants who gave detailed accounts that were exemplary of the theory being presented.

The case studies for the present study were chosen using four criteria. (1) All three chosen participants provided detailed and compelling narratives. (2) Across the three case studies, all four types of lifestyle identified in the related paper by Morgan and Bennett (2021a) are discussed. (3) All three transition themes identified in the current paper are represented across the three chosen case studies interviews. (4) They include antecedents and subsequent events related to lifestyle transition that were familiar across the sample.

Mo: I was absolutely smashing it:

Mo's story was included as it shows how people who use heroin can understand transitions in their lifestyles through choice, while at the same time acknowledging times where choice could not be exercised. The story is also telling since Mo is clear about how personal resources and social connections enabled him to make desired changes to his lifestyle, while social connections of a different kind help to explain a less desired transition, in the shape of a relapse.

'I was selling 40-50 keys a week, I was absolutely smashing it'.

Before ever using heroin, Mo was a successful drug dealer, a wholesaler of cannabis resin. As can be seen in the above quotation, Mo claimed to be selling 40 to 50 kilograms per week and turning a very good profit. His heroin use began when a girlfriend introduced him to her brother who in turn introduced Mo to heroin, although he claims he was not aware that what he was smoking was heroin until he felt his first withdrawal symptoms. According to Morgan and Bennett's (2021a) typology, Mo was an archetypal *Top Boy*: a high earning drug dealer, popular among a gang of hangers on who welcomed his generosity (also see Morgan and Silverstone, 2023). As well as a using heroin prolifically, Mo was also a heavy user of crack cocaine. After six months or so using heroin, the drug use impacted his business:

When I was smoking gear, I'd just switch into a different zone, I just didn't want nothing to do with all that crap, didn't have time to go driving around here dropping off here, dropping off there, so it just stopped like that.

This reduction in earnings did not initially lead to a change in lifestyle, Mo had enough money saved up from his earlier commercial success to continue to support more or less constant drug use:

I'd lean over, maybe smoke a few lines, maybe smoke a ten bag, maybe a twenty bag, before I knew it I'd wake up again, cos it would knock me out, and I'd fall asleep, be in bed and just carry on again, back on the foil, I'd stay in bed, I dunno, say I have my first boot eight O'clock in the morning, or even six O'clock in the morning the first one, I wouldn't get out of bed until four in the afternoon.

When his lifestyle changed this was explained in terms of 'taking an opportunity'. His memory is shaky, but he explains the change due to either a relationship issue, lack of funds or a drought in the local heroin market:

I think I got back with the misses, I didn't split up for long, I think, I'm not too sure, I'm sure I got back with the misses, so I cut down, or I didn't have the money to afford it, I dropped back down... or it went dry, I couldn't get the gear, something happened here... for a good while and the gear wasn't as good neither, and you just couldn't get it.

Mo was now a *Domestic User* primarily relating to more modest drug use. His recollections from this period also include having to fit heroin use around domestic duties such as the school run. During this interview Mo was giving retrospective accounts of an 18-year heroin career so it is not surprising that he could not be firm on exact details. It is plausible that his lifestyle changed, and levels of heroin use undulated several times for different reasons. What is important for the purposes of this analysis is that he did not describe a move to lower drug use and more respectable living a valiant battle, more just something that happened due to a change in circumstances.

The same cannot be said for the narrative of Mo's break away from heroin use. This story was truly one of grabbing onto 'hooks for change' after a chance meeting with his mother:

My mum bumped into me said, bla bla bla, we walked round my sister's house, and she said listen, cause I was on methadone, cause I was on heroin, and my mum said, we need to take you off this crap, I've had enough, I don't care what your father says, I've had twenty four years of not talking to you... I was determined to come off it... when I was doing my detox and people were phoning me going come on, I got the most banging gear, and I'd say I don't want any I don't want any... so basically, I got off it and as soon as I got off it, I felt absolutely great.

As well as the chance meeting with his estranged mother, this story also included some expensive treatment at a well know clinic in London, certainly requiring some economic capital. This move to abstinence was not the last change in lifestyle reported by Mo, since after some time not using heroin, he relapsed. His narrative invokes 'losing control'. He claims that the shock of an arrest and side effects from his medication led him to use heroin when he bumped into an old friend in court after his bail hearing:

He says I got some on me, and I says, cos I was really coming down off these tablets, I was really really ill, so he gave me that and he had a needle on him as well, so I've given him a tenner for the bag, I was doin it in the toilets.

Since this incident Mo had described living again as a *Domestic User* and was doing so at the point of the interview, desperate to quit but feeling defeated after this misfortune. Taken as a whole Mo's story is one where he remembers an enjoyable and highly hedonistic beginning to his heroin using career before managing to balance his drug use with family life and then choosing a life away from heroin only to then find himself using again, but this time against his will.

Sonia: I think we'd come to the point

Sonia's story includes some similarities to *Mo's*: She found that personal resources allowed for prolific drug use. However, this story is included since compared to *Mo*, she described having less choice and control over her drug using lifestyles. Also, unlike *Mo*, at the point of the interview she had somewhat successfully chosen a lifestyle away from heroin use. For *Sonia*, the theme 'losing control' was used to understand her move from being a *Domestic User* to living *On the Run*. Then she grabbed onto 'hooks for change' in the shape of court mandated drug treatment and personal resources that aided her move away from heroin use.

At the onset of heroin use *Sonia* smoked crack with her boyfriend, using heroin to cushion the unpleasant after-effects of the drug. Eventually physical dependency promoted heroin to being her primary drug. The stories told from the beginning of her heroin using career suggest that she was living as a *Domestic User*. Although crack use is not typical for this lifestyle type, other criteria were present, *Sonia* and her boyfriend had regular daily routines and she considered herself '*a stable user*'. They shoplifted large expensive items since they looked respectable and owned a car:

We'd go to Asda steal TVs computers, laptops... cos at this point we still looked clean, do you know what I mean, even at our heaviest use we, we'd steal nice clothes... so maybe we looked less suspectable.

At some point their drug use became heavier and their lifestyle more erratic. This represented a gradual move from being *Domestic Users* to living *On the Run*:

We'd like stay at drug dealers' houses and things like that do you know what I mean... in the increase period we were raising say, I don't know a hundred and

fifty pounds a day, or more actually, say two hundred pound a day...instead of say just being content with just going to one Asda's and nicking a plasma TV we'd then drive around and say go to a couple of different Asda's or Tesco extra's... it's easy to become greedy.

Seeing heroin lifestyle change in an undesirable direction was an example 'losing control'. The next transition was far more sudden and led to a period of desistance:

I'd got into an argument with some girl, she'd attacked me, and I was just completely out of my mind, high and whatever off crack... but I just battered her with a stick... I think I should have gone to prison... Even though I was on the DRR (Drug Rehabilitation Requirement), and he wasn't, he still got clean with me and... I think we'd come to the point where we both we just had enough I think, it was killing us, it was killing our relationship, obviously we'd spoke about it a lot yeah, what our lives have become, we'd end up selling our possessions and things.

This transition was another example of grabbing onto 'hooks for change'. As well as the shock to the system caused by committing an instance of violence that she was deeply ashamed of, being given a Drug Rehabilitation Requirement that mandated treatment for both her heroin and crack use was helpful in affecting change. In addition, Sonia said she benefited from a good upbringing and supportive family that also aided her moves away from heavy drug use. At the point of the interview, she was in a somewhat ambiguous situation since she had been separated from her boyfriend and had relapsed into some instances of drug use but also claimed not to be using heroin or crack. However, she was also in a precarious situation since she was homeless, drinking heavily and living in a particularly chaotic hostel.

Gerwyn: 'I couldn't pinch to save my life'

Gerwyn's story features some similar narrative turns to the previous two case studies while also demonstrating the peculiarities of how some forms of capital grow or diminish over a heroin using career, and how this relates to both deliberate and unchosen lifestyle transitions.

'I've never been a criminal, I've always worked'

Gerwyn was brought up in a small town and regrets taking a factory job straight from school at the cost of going to college and learning a skill, he described a succession of temporary and unstable jobs. Although at pains to insist he is a worker and not a criminal he experienced one prison sentence after losing his temper with a friend and *'smashed his flat up'*. Considering his manner during the interview, this incident feels highly out of character. While in prison he tried heroin on a couple of occasions. Some years later while he was working away a friend had been staying in his flat, upon Gerwyn's return *'there is a room full of all the boys I wouldn't want in my flat sitting there'*. Not being an assertive character, he allowed them to stay, and within a couple of months was using heroin with them, and two weeks later he *'had a habit'*.

Thus, began a period of his life living as a *Domestic User*. While not wishing to steal things himself, his car was a crucial resource since he initially began giving fellow users lifts to dealers' houses, later he began taxiing shoplifters between supermarkets, fences, and dealers. He was rewarded in heroin and considered his use excessive during this period.

Gerwyn had been tiring of this lifestyle, news of his heroin use had travelled fast losing him friends and straining relations with family. Approaching his father and asking for money was an occasional low point. Everything changed when the police seized his car and with it his source of income.

I couldn't make money, I couldn't do anybody any favours. I was like, do you know what I mean? You've got to buy yourself food, you've got to do this plus you've got to keep a habit going it didn't last long, I was struggling... before the heroin came along, I weren't a criminal you know?

After attempting to survive without his key asset for three months he moved to a nearby city where his lifestyle changed dramatically. Being homeless, living in a hostel and barely scraping by he was now living *On the Wander*.

It were just floor space, they tell you not to come here until 10 o'clock at night and they chuck you out at half past seven in the morning... I just shit myself basically... I thought no way I'm bothering with like tramps and that, down and outs. It was bonkers, I didn't expect it to be like that... I was struggling, I was really struggling. Like I say I can't make money, I can't pinch, and I can't do this so yeah, some days I'd go without gear.

Despite not being cut out for life *On the Wander* there was no real avenue for escape until he received a council flat, where he was still living at the point of the interview. Although he has not completely moved away from the heroin scene, he no longer uses every day. At the point of the interview, he was also embarking on a college course. His most recent use came after a chance encounter with one of the shoplifters who he used to chauffeur back in his hometown, this former accomplice was now dealing and treated Gerwyn to a crack and heroin binge.

Discussion

The nature of persistent heroin use:

Many of the participants of this study described heroin-using careers that included transitions between different sorts of lifestyle, which did not necessarily manifest as a set of stages, challenging the views of Faupel (1991), one of the few authors to have discussed this issue. People who use heroin reported preferences over their lifestyles that did not always relate to desistance from drug use. While stories were told where deliberate changes were made, in other cases lifestyle changes were accidental or unwanted.

Choosing a lifestyle:

The findings revealed three themes that people who use heroin utilised to explain changes to their lifestyles. These were grabbing onto 'hooks for change', 'taking an opportunity' and 'losing control'. Although it is beyond the scope of the current paper to elaborate in detail, these themes require some development.

The concept of grabbing onto 'hooks for change' has been developed by Giordano et al. (2002) to explain long lasting moves away from lives of crime. Here it seems that this narrative device is also used to explain changes in the lives of people who use heroin that are shorter lived and not necessarily affecting desistance. This explanation for change relates to Bourdieu's (1990, 2010) theory of practice, in that changes are made by drawing on types of capital that support a change. Morgan and Bennett (2021a) and Moyle and

Coomber (2017) have sought to invoke a full conception of this theory including the concepts of habitus, field, and capital. Meanwhile Cloud and Granfield (2008) have developed the concept of recovery capital, which bundles together different sorts of resources that allow for a dramatic change of lifestyle. Cloud and Granfield (2008) acknowledged the possibility of negative recovery capital, in terms of resources that prevent transitions away from substance use. This concept remains under-developed and could be conceptualised as capital that helps to explain persistence. Future research might aim to develop a scheme that can explain how capital can be required for persistent drug use.

The second theme, 'taking an opportunity', is similar to explanations relating to grabbing onto 'hooks for change'. Notably, Bourdieusian capital was often prominent in narratives of 'taking an opportunity'. Further theory should aim to elaborate on the roles of accidental changes, good fortune, or serendipity in lifestyle changes. While opportunity has been familiar in explanations of criminal behaviour (e.g., Cornish and Clarke, 2014), serendipity has seldom been explored by criminologists. Jacobs (2010) used the concept to show how street offenders' day-to-day business tended to rely on serendipity: Although the opportunities to offend were somewhat fortuitous it was important for the offender to be prepared to take an opportunity when presented. Criminologists such as Matza (2017) have evoked the concept of drift to show how criminals need not be committed to crime but instead live through periods of criminal behaviour and conformity based on their changing situations. This too is a potential site for theoretical synthesis and development.

The third theme, 'losing control', suggests another distinct theoretical direction. Here, unwanted changes were explained due to temporary lapses in control. While Morgan and

Bennett (2021a) found that people who use heroin reported the need for control to persist in certain sorts of heroin using lifestyle, the present research found that a lack of control was at the root of explanations for some transitions between heroin using lifestyles.

Lifestyle transitions and drug interventions:

The case studies showed how transitions in lifestyle can have implications for drug use and related behaviour that can harm people who use heroin as well as those around them. Indeed, it is self-evident that ‘losing control’ might relate to heightened patterns of drug use and a greater potential for harm. When participants wished to scale down on their drug use, then grabbing onto ‘hooks for change’ and ‘taking an opportunity’ could facilitate that change.

Practitioners might utilise the desire for lifestyle change and focus on lifestyle transitions as sites for both harm reduction and recovery. It is well established how recovery capital can be drawn upon for those who wish to move away from drug use and non-conforming behaviour (e.g., Hennessy, 2017). The present research has shown how similar sorts of capital can be used to make changes that may be beneficial to drug users even when accompanied by continued drug use. This may be one of the basic tenets of harm reduction, however the paper contributes to this by explicitly tying lifestyles change and a desire for an improved lifestyle to harm reduction.

Recovery capital has been shown to be a predictor of desistance from drug use and accompanying large scale lifestyle change (e.g., Best et al., 2020), and we (Morgan and Bennett, 2021a) have previously argued that lifestyle can be relevant in terms of recovery capital. We have further argued that people who use heroin with differing lifestyles might be suitable for different sorts of treatment and in some cases heroin-

assisted treatment might be considered as an option. While potential triggers of lifestyle transition, such as criminal justice sanctions, are already utilised in terms of methadone maintenance therapy, perhaps a wider range of treatment options, such as heroin assisted treatment, might be an option. The advent of homelessness is another point of potential lifestyle transition, and one where people who use heroin are likely to engage with housing services. Drug-use assessments and treatments might be offered to those who are newly homeless alongside solutions more directly related to their housing issues.

In addition, participants' narratives included harm reduction therapies as triggers for desired lifestyle change. In both *Mo's* and *Sonia's* stories, treatment that involved opiate substitution featured in narratives of achieving positively valued changes by grabbing onto 'hooks for change'. Opiate substitution, in the form of methadone maintenance also featured in narratives of 'taking an opportunity', where positive changes were made without an emphasis on the story tellers' agency.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that heroin-users often live certain types of lifestyle which do not always co-occur with a desire for recovery. These findings have also shown that the terrains negotiated by people who use heroin are challenging and how a loss of control can affect unwanted changes as much as opportunities can be surprisingly presented for desired changes to be made.

Future research should consider how accidental and fortuitous lifestyle changes occur and their implications for heroin use. This would suggest developing a more holistic theoretical framework to understand persistent heroin use.

Disclosure of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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