

TALL POPPY CAMPAIGN

Investing in Australia's Future

Young Tall Poppy Profile: Dr Rebecca McKetin

Name: Rebecca McKetin

Title: Dr

Research Field: Public health

More Specifically: Methamphetamine and other drug use

In other words: 'ice' or 'crystal meth'

Abbreviated Qualifications: BSc (Psychol) Hons. PhD

Current position: Senior Research Fellow

University/Institution: University of New South Wales

What do you do?

I work with a team of young researchers to find out how many people are addicted to the drug 'ice' (or methamphetamine), how many of them have mental health problems like psychosis or depression, and how many get help. This involves doing surveys with people who use the drug, including people at dance parties through to people in drug rehabilitation centres. Sometimes the studies involve following people over time to see how they fare after drug treatment.

Why is this research important? How is it relevant to society at large?

Sixteen per cent of young Australian adults have tried 'ice' and over 15,000 people go to drug treatment each year because they are addicted to this drug. Addiction can have a devastating impact on people's lives and those of their family and friends. Understanding who is addicted and the types of problems they experience helps us to treat drug addiction.

What's difficult about it?

It is highly political. You also hear some pretty upsetting things about what people have been through in their life, but it is a privilege that people trust us enough to tell us their stories. It has made me more determined to make a difference.

Why are you passionate about it?

Our response to social problems needs to be grounded in an understanding of who is affected, how they are affected, and how we can help them. The data I collect helps answer these questions.

Why share your research with high school students?

I want to show students how research can be used to understand a broad range of social issues and to help solve social problems.

Why study sciences?

It is fun. You get to do really cool things, and work with people who are 'switched on' and passionate about what they do. You have flexible working hours, you get to work independently, and you get to travel and work with researchers from other countries. You are also doing something that makes a difference.

Is it what you've always wanted to do?

I've always wanted to be a research scientist. But I started out wanting to be a physicist, and I ended up researching drug use and psychosis. I never imagined I'd be working with drug users, but I find it incredibly interesting. It is a very human side to science.

What else are you into?

I love to travel, read, cook, play music, and I'm a canoeist. I've also recently taken up swing dancing, which is a very funky resurgence of the 1930-40's dance era.

Public profile:

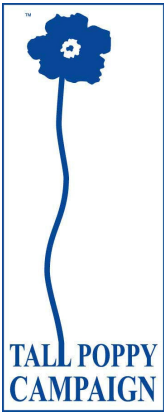
Rebecca has been interviewed on *Catalyst*, *Insight* and *The 7:30 report*. Her research has received widespread news coverage but she particularly enjoys doing feature stories, like the ABC Life Matters and Health Report programs. She also enjoys doing information seminars for local community organizations.

Founded by the Australian Institute of Policy and Science

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Your achievements - How did you get where you are today?

Your HSC subjects: 3U Maths, 2U Physics, 2U Chemistry, 2U Engineering Science and 2U English

Degrees: Honours degree in Science (Psychology), PhD (Public Health and Community Medicine)

Some of your previous position/s:

Laboratory Assistant, School of Psychology, UNSW

Senior Research Assistant/ National Coordinator, Illicit Drug Reporting System, NDARC, UNSW
Epidemiologist for Southern and Eastern Africa, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Current position:

Senior Research Fellow, National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales

Relevant awards and prizes you have received as part of your studies/research/work: Rebecca received a post graduate research award from NSW Health to complete her doctoral thesis at the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW. Since then she has received a UNSW John Yu Fellowship to work with researchers at Imperial College in London, and her team were finalists in the 2008 National Drug and Alcohol Awards for Excellence in Research.

Summary of published works: Rebecca has published over 60 papers, including 24 scientific journal articles, 7 book chapters and she has written reports on illicit drug use for the United Nations.

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