

Reader Views

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American Meth: A History of the Methamphetamine Epidemic in America

Sterling R Braswell

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Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (5/06)

Sterling Braswell has written a fascinating book about drug use in America. He begins with the history of amphetamines. It has been used almost 100 years. Meth was used in the 1920's to treat asthma, hay fever and depression. At this time it was legal and did not carry a social stigma. Amphetamines were used in the military because it was believed to enhance intellectual performance and incite aggression.

Hitler was injected with it. Kamikaze pilots were injected with it before they went out on their suicide missions. JFK used it combined with steroids to treat Addison's disease. It was attributed to contributing to his abnormally high sex drive. Today meth abusers come from all walks of life: students, soldiers, workers, housewives.

The damage caused by meth use is insidious. Dopamine nerve terminals are damaged to the point that they put people at risk for developing Parkinson's as they get older. Some of the damage is permanent, and some can last up to three years after the use ends. Meth use triggers apoptosis which causes widespread cell death in several areas of the brain. The brain is affected in ways similar to the damage caused by Alzheimer's and strokes. The abuser's personality is also affected. They become paranoid, delusional and violent. Braswell refers to their reality as "Crazy Town." This becomes the user's world.

In this book, Braswell also includes his own personal story of the hell that he went through while he was married to Lucille, an addict. Lucille was unable to overcome her addiction and as a result of her meth addicted actions, she nearly destroyed Braswell. As I read his personal story, I kept hoping that their lives would improve and that Lucille would be able to overcome her addictions. Instead she betrayed him and his family in every way possible.

The history of methamphetamines and other related drugs is covered in great depth. "American Meth" would be very helpful for substance abuse counselors and people in recovery. For my Master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling, I did not have any texts that covered the history so deeply.

I think that it is important for people who believe that drugs should be legalized should read "American Meth." Crime is not just committed by people trying to get money for a fix, horrible crimes are committed by people who are under the influence of this drug. Families are destroyed.