

White, W. (2002) (Book review): Beating the dragon: The recovery from dependent drug use. by James McIntosh & Neil McKeganey. *Addiction* 97(7):919-920.

**Beating the Dragon: The Recovery from Dependent Drug Use.** James McIntosh & Neil McKeganey, Prentice Hall, Harlow, England, 2002, 176 pp. ISBN 0-13-087171-0

*Beating the Dragon* is a highly readable study that adds to the growing genre of international literature on the stages and processes of addiction recovery. McIntosh and McKeganey depict the natural or treatment-assisted recovery processes of seventy individuals from Scotland who had been dependent upon opiates and/or other drugs.

Following a brief review of prior research on recovery, *Beating the Dragon* takes the reader through a chronology of the lives of its subjects, with chapters on becoming and being addicted, deciding to quit, and remaining abstinent. The authors' goals in this text are to document successful recovery from addiction, illustrate the "strength, fortitude, openness, commitment and resilience" exhibited by people in recovery, and convey the high degree of individuality represented in the processes of addiction recovery. These goals are ably met, primarily by allowing the voices of the recovering addicts to express their evolving identities and the details of their evolving lifestyles. The most common stages of recovery included a progressive depreciation of pharmacological rewards; the sudden or gradual recognition of a spoiled life; enhanced attachment with parents, partners and children; hope for the future; and reconstruction of personal identity, social relationships and daily lifestyle.

While much of the findings of McIntosh and McKeganey echo earlier work, particularly that of Biernacki and Waldorf, there are some fresh contributions in *Beating the Dragon*. This book is one of the few works in which addicts describe in their own words the value of methadone in their recovery processes. Given the continued stigma and controversy attached to methadone at both public and professional levels, this contribution alone is noteworthy. The chapter on children also expands the scope of earlier studies by portraying the impact of addiction and recovery on the ongoing development of children and the family as a whole.

McIntosh and McKeganey's vivid portrayal of recovery as a complex and time-enduring process for the individual and family challenges the serial episodes of disconnected, acute interventions that often typify professional

interventions into the lives of addicts and their families. If one were to construct a model of professional intervention for McIntosh and McKeganey's addicts (high problem severity, co-occurring problems, deep enmeshment in drug and criminal subcultures, and low social supports), that model might be more aptly labeled "recovery management" than "treatment." Such a recovery management model would emphasize early engagement and stabilization; sustained monitoring, feedback and support; construction of a recovery-based identity and social network; the provision of recovery support services (sober housing, employment); and, whenever necessary, early re-intervention. That refined vision alone makes *Beating the Dragon* a worthy read.

For those who have spent their careers studying and treating addiction, *Beating the Dragon* is a welcome invitation into the world of recovery. Its methodology is an affirmation that addiction and recovery can be studied from the inside, through the voices of those who have experienced both. The growing legitimization of the first-person voices of addiction and recovery is in itself noteworthy, as is the promising shift in focus from the ethnography of problems (addiction) to the ethnography of solutions (recovery).