

The ups and downs of Heroin Careers: Implications for persistence

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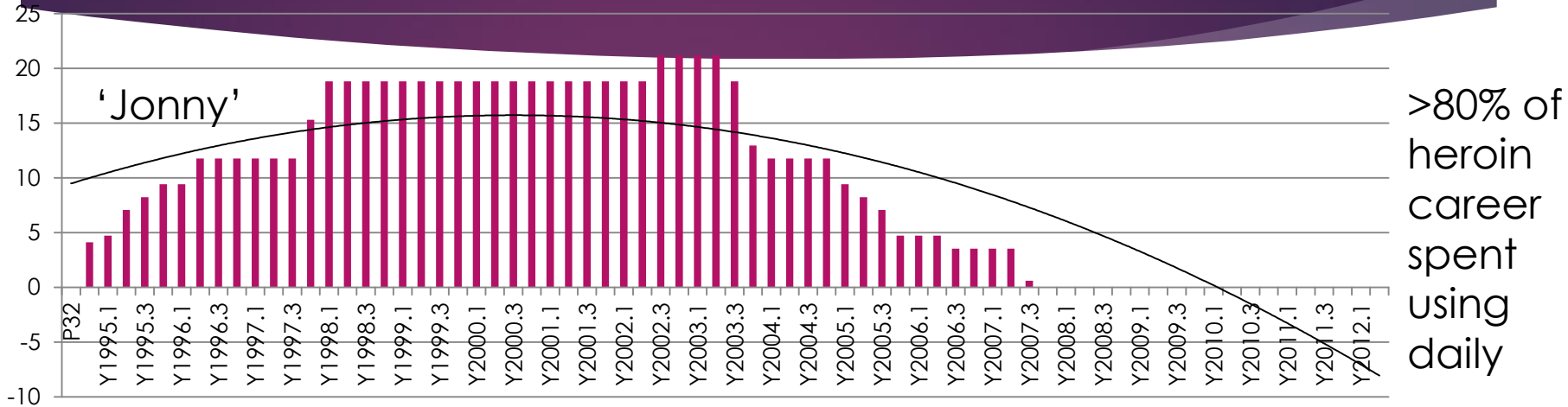
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Advancing Career Capital
to explain success in
persistent heroin use

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Strong Persisters

Career capital tends to be strong and grows throughout the heroin career, up to a point



'Asked if I could score, obviously my aunty was selling at the time so walked up to her street, three bags for £25, back to mine' (Ben)

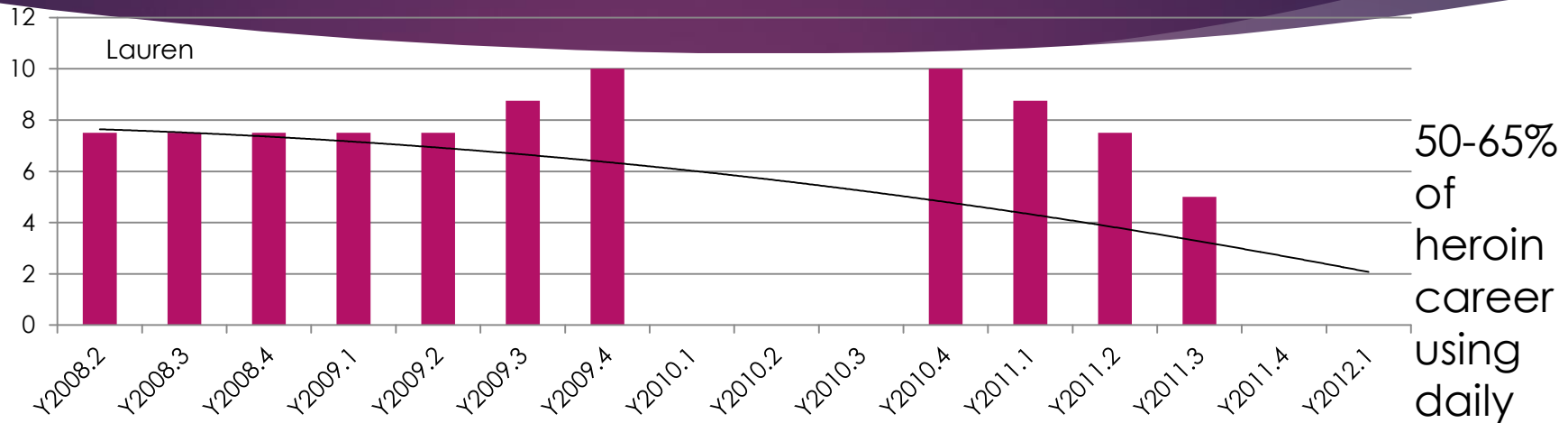
'I use to go and travel up the country to shoplift... one person would buy it in bulk... I know her all my life' (Amber)

I'd come out of care and gone up North to straighten myself out, and I ended up being the worst drug dealer in the town (Jonny)

yeah, yeah, I started begging because erm, now I was starting to run out of options, of shops and er, I was getting followed everywhere round town, it was just becoming impossible do er do anything, I was sort of forced into, having to bring my habit down (Ray)

Weak Persisters

Career capital starts low, grows slowly if at all



I visited him in prison and I moved back with my Mum and I just gave up. Because I reduced myself so much because I didn't really know anybody (Lauren)

I can't shoplift, it's like I got a neon sign on my head (Gary)

I started getting stressed and pissed off, bothering with the wrong kind of crowd. I started to feel embarrassed, just realised look at the people I'm bothering with look at the people that aren't talking to me now 'cause of the people I'm bothering with (Gerwyn)

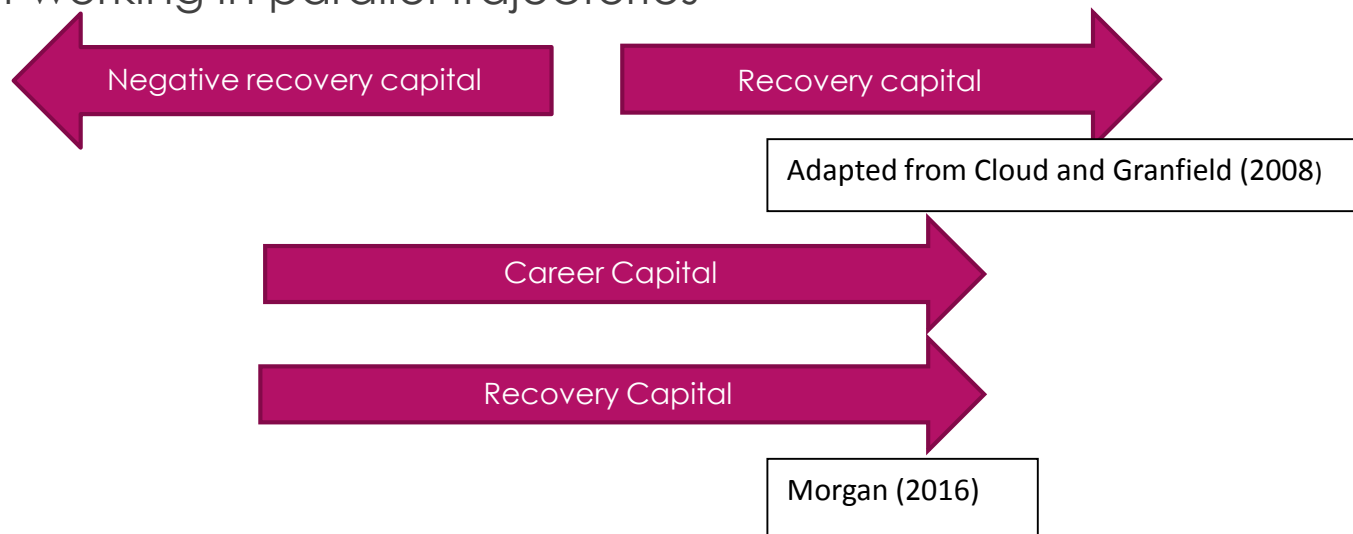
I just couldn't be bothered any more, I just couldn't be bothered to go out raising (stealing), you know what I mean, I was exhausted with the lifestyle, I was exhausted with getting up every day and doing that, do you know what I mean, the reputation that comes with it, you know, people think that you're an untrustworthy person, and just it's not good (Sonia)

Career capital

- ▶ How heroin users can react to difficulties faced, depends on their stock of **career capital**
- ▶ Personal characteristics useful for criminal earning e.g. intelligence, criminal skill, capacity for cooperation (Criminal capital: Shover 1996)
- ▶ Social connections in drug and criminal economies (Social capital: Copes and Charbonneau 2014)
- ▶ Identities resistant to stigma and disapproval '*like water off a duck's back*' (Kev) '*I got higher standards than this*' (Milo)
- ▶ **Career capital** rests on abilities and identities accrued by participants throughout their lives
- ▶ Tied together by habitus: 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1977, 1991)
- ▶ 'a set of cognitive structures acquired across the life course which are shared across a social category'

Theoretical Implications

- ▶ Recovery capital is established as important in maintaining recovery, Career capital should be seen as important in maintaining persistent heroin use (rather than marginalised as Negative recovery capital (Cloud and Granfield 2008))
- ▶ Stigma and expense of heroin make 'Career capital' somewhat special
- ▶ Recovery capital and Career capital should not be seen as opposing forces, but working in parallel trajectories



Implications for practice and policy

- ▶ Changing crime: fewer easy criminal opportunities?
- ▶ Heroin career timelines as diagnostic tool (see Plaisant *et al* 1996, Prochaska *et al* 1992)
 - ▶ Heroin users who struggle to persist strong candidate for abstinence based therapies?
 - ▶ How can 'career gaps' be utilised by practitioners?
 - ▶ Should strong persisters only be left with harm reduction options?