

## **Experiences of trauma among people accessing a supervised injecting facility: a mixed-methods study**

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**Introduction:** Supervised injecting facilities (SIFs) support a vulnerable population who often have significant mental health needs and a heightened rate of exposure to violence. However, there has been limited research on the nature and extent of traumatic experiences among people who use these services, how trauma influences engagement, or the ways in which SIFs work to alleviate trauma.

**Method:** Participants (n=102) were recruited from the Melbourne Supervised Injecting Room (MSIR) in Victoria, Australia, completing a survey that assessed serious life events (The Life Events Checklist; LEC) and symptoms of PTSD (the International Trauma Questionnaire; ITQ). Twenty-one participants completed an in-depth qualitative interview.

**Results:** Two-thirds of participants (62.8%) had experienced serious life events in 7 or more categories, with over one-third (38.7%) reporting symptoms consistent with 30-day PTSD. In interviews, participants described complex trauma histories with prominent themes including overdose, violence, and encounters with the police and criminal justice system. Narratives highlighted how these experiences were a common and normalised feature of participants' everyday lives, alongside pervasive experiences of judgement and stigmatisation. The MSIR was highly valued for mitigating a range of health and social harms, providing a point of entry for other supports, and helping clients meet basic needs such as food and stable housing.

**Conclusions:** Regular users of the MSIR reported an extensive history of serious life events and long-lasting experiences of trauma. Ongoing relationships with staff were key to establishing trust and engagement with services. However, structural sources of trauma can profoundly impact their access and use by marginalised populations.

### **Implications for Practice:**

While trauma-informed supports such as counselling are essential, SIFs play a broader role in responding to trauma by providing clients with a sense of safety and respite, as well as essential resources that may better position them to address their mental health needs.

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