

Exploring the strengths and experience of people using opiate dependence therapy using photovoice: a qualitative study

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Introduction: The strengths, assets, and aspirations of people who use drugs are often missing in the discussion of opioid dependence treatment (ODT) in Australia, with descriptions of stigmatising experiences among people who use drugs attending Australian health services being more common. Given the impact of stigma on the experiences of people who use drugs, methods that empower and amplify their voices, such as 'photovoice', offer a valuable approach to reshaping narratives and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment in ODT. This study aims to understand the strengths and experiences of people engaging with ODT in general practice and community pharmacies through photovoice methodology.

Methods: Taking an ethnographic photovoice approach to addressing this research question, we intend to explore the phenomenon of community-based ODT prescribing and dispensing within the real-life contexts of 15 – 20 people who are engaging with ODT. Participants will take photographs over a two-week period, returning their cameras to the researchers at the end of this period. The researchers will have the photographs processed and will then meet with the participants to elucidate the meaning of the photographs through qualitative interviews. Analysis will adopt a reflexive thematic approach and a strengths-based approach with an emphasis on the assets used by individuals to strengthen health and wellbeing drawing on Antonovsky's salutogenic approach.

Results: We anticipate having completed data collection and analysis by November 2025. The expected outcomes include a showcasing of the strengths of people who use drugs with a view to destigmatising discourse involving people who use drugs and improving access to opioid dependence treatment.

Discussions and Conclusions: There is limited qualitative evidence documenting the experience of people who access ODT in primary care settings, and limited evidence related to the strengths of the people who are accessing this treatment.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Identifying strengths may help in the development of strengths-based approaches to health service delivery.

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