

Symposium: Harm Reductionists in Australia: Talking Smack with Narcofeminist Researchers and Practitioners

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Aim: This symposium provides localised insight to peer Harm Reduction practices by and for women in Australia. The aim is to challenge the 'double erasure'¹ or combined stigma² of drug use and gender with an inclusive vision³ of drug harms and pleasures, to challenge the representation of Women Who Inject Drugs (WWID) and Women Who Use Drugs (WWUD). Panelists began a community of practice in response to *2024 National AOD Data Report*⁴. The compiled data from a range of harm reduction strategies including needle and syringe programs and opioid dependency treatment and showed women to be underrepresented in accessing these services at the same time as being overrepresented in behaviours such as receptive sharing of syringes and other behaviours.

¹ Perrin S. Les mondes cachés de la drogue. L'invisibilité Des femmes insérées socialement. Université de Bordeaux; 2022.

² Meyers S. A., Earnshaw V. A., D'Ambrosio B., Courchesne N., Werb D., Smith L. R. (2021). The intersection of gender and drug use-related stigma: A mixed methods systematic review and synthesis of the literature. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 223, 108706

³ Dennis F., Pienaar K., Rosengarten M. (2023a). Afterword: Tensions and possibilities for a narcofeminist sociology. *The Sociological Review*, 71(4), 945–954.

⁴ *Harm Reduction Australia. (2025). 2024 National AOD Data Report: Annual overview of drug issues in Australia. HRA.*

Detailed Description of Topics to be Discussed:

Discussion Section:

This panel discusses lived-living experience (LLE) research and harm reduction strategies from the intersections of gender and substance use⁵. Working to disrupt deficit narratives of wayward women⁶ and recovery refusers⁷ the panel brings stories and strategies of locally grounded, peer-led narcofeminist harm reduction responses. Rather than reproducing binary logic of gender, the discussion draws on Butler's feminist theorisation of gender as constituted through repeated acts that are revised, reiterated, and reconstituted over time⁸ as a premise for examining and expanding the aperture of views on drug use practices, to foreground multiplicity, fluidity, and resistance within lived experiences.⁹

Aims of the Interactive Component:

1. Translating research into practice - different perspectives from researchers and lived – living experience across multiple disciplines
2. Elevating Lived – Living Experience (LLE) Perspectives in overdose prevention and harm reduction
3. Assessing and addressing the intersections of gender in peer workforce / stigma in the field

Desired Outcomes for Attendees

- Greater understanding of harm reduction approaches that posit gender is produced and negotiated in contexts of substance use.
- Practical insight into localised, decolonising, queering peer-led harm reduction strategies.
- Stronger connections between researchers, peer organisations, and practitioners for future collaboration.
- A curated resource list including readings, toolkits, and harm reduction materials co-developed by peer-led groups.

Discussion Format:

1. Facilitated Panel Introductions and Disruptive Approaches to Harm Reduction
 2. Interaction: Lessons learnt and unlearnt for integrating intersectional feminist and queer perspectives into drug policy, research, and service provision: engagement with autoethnographical texts around heroin and opioid use and ecstasy and emerging psychoactive substances.
 3. Open Q&A: Questions from attendees welcomed via microphone or written cards to accommodate access and communication preferences.
 4. Closing Reflections & Key Takeaways: Attendees receive a resource handout or QR code linking to further reading, practice tools, and peer organisation contacts.
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⁵ Dennis F., Pienaar K., Rosengarten M. (2023b). Narcofeminism and its multiples: From activism to everyday minoritarian worldbuilding. *The Sociological Review*, 71(4), 723–740

⁶ Dennis, F., & Pienaar, K. (2023). Refusing recovery, living a 'wayward life': A feminist analysis of women's drug use. *The Sociological Review*, 71(4), 781-800.

⁷ Simon, C., Roberts, L., Vincent, L., Koval, R., Ortiz-Adames, D., Tsinas, G., Adams, H. B., & Nichols, T. R. (2024). Narrative Disruption: Evolving Narcofeminism Storyshare. *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 52(1), 45-65.

⁸ Butler J. (1990). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In Case S.E. (Ed.), *Performing feminisms: Feminist critical theory and theatre* (pp. 270–283). Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁹ Chang, J. (2023). Narcofeminism: A feminist auto-ethnography on drugs. *The Sociological Review*, 71(4), 760-779.

Audience Takeaways

- A more nuanced understanding of the intersections between gender, stigma, and drug use.
- Strategies for applying a gender-informed, peer-led lens to harm reduction in their own work.
- Shared understanding of innovative, localised peer support programs for women and gender-diverse PWUD.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *N/A*