

How do socio-political values pervade the way 'opioid dependence' is conceived and treated through Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST)?

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**This PhD project is still in progress; 'findings' thus far come primarily from reviewing literature. This poster concerns the research's direction and its methodology*

BACKGROUND

OST services reduce opioid dependence through the regular dosage of substitute opioid receptor agonists (such as methadone or buprenorphine). Have political developments allowed various interests and values to compete at these services under the guise of being objective (scientific) procedures?

RESULTS OF A LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies show similar overseas services operate despite conflicting rationalities/perspectives amongst staff (and with service users). Key workers were generally found to be more abstinence-oriented than their colleagues. Health professionals working in this field (overseas) operate on a continuum of models. They may unconsciously move between a moral model and a harm reduction model in response to external pressures across time. No similar research exists for New Zealand services. Research must consider what values inform differences in perspectives between individuals, how this is realised in their activities, how their activities continuously reproduce understandings of 'dependence', whose account of what makes one 'dependent' to opioids is given credence, how the functions of OST differ from guidelines and expectations, and what this all says about the nature of dependence.

RESEARCH AIMS

To consider the following:

1. Whether OST responsabilise service users to manage their substance use.
2. Whether key texts co-ordinate service users and staff in-line with certain socio-political values.
3. How informants perceive service users' substance use.

I will assess how 'dependence' diagnoses (those which are supposedly apolitical), are constituted through institutional values and interactions, and how these shape informants' lives.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This project is an Institutional Ethnography. It looks at how social relations govern individuals within an institution (OST). In this study, the day-to-day happenings of an OST service (Pitman House, Auckland), plus, the wider institution of 'opioid dependence' treatment (community pharmacies, other related specialist services, and relevant policy makers) is assessed.

First, OST service staff are **observed** during meetings. Here, service policies, protocols, and responsibilities are discussed amongst staff; also, decisions are made on how the service should be run. The service itself is also being observed; its layout, and what-happens-where is being noted. **Interviews** are with service staff and service users, as well as community pharmacists and policy makers. The interviewee's role within the service, their perspective on opioid use, and how both are informed by texts is being assessed. **Key texts** (guidelines, pamphlets, forms) are being assessed to understand how they guide action. All data collection occurs iteratively. Results are then processed through **mapping**, whereby the complex social relations that organise the institution are uncovered.

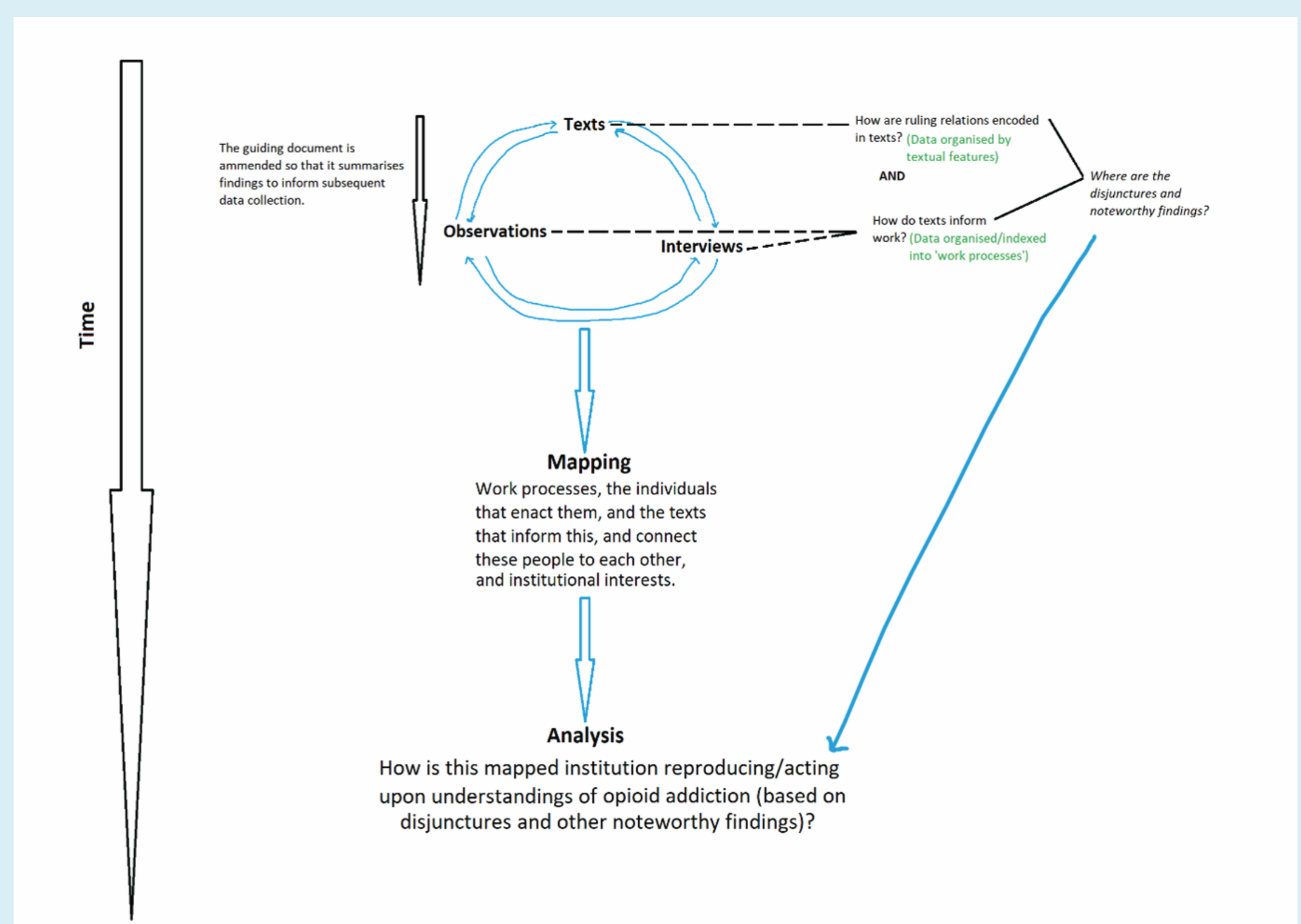


Figure 1. Data Collection and Analysis