

Voices represented and voices silenced: Case study of North Richmond Community Health medically supervised injecting room

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Introduction/Aim: The media is widely credited with framing public opinion and political debate. Victoria's first medically supervised injecting room (MSIR) has remained controversial despite mounting evidence in support of the trial. This research examines the actors represented in print news media reporting and the possible effects of such reporting.

Methods: A mixed method approach, combining a quantitative content analysis followed by a qualitative thematic discourse analysis of Victorian print news media.

Results: The opinions and experiences of the 'general public' featured heavily. While voices of 'residents' were comprehensively presented, there was concern with the lack of ongoing consultation surrounding the facility. Many articles cited repeated requests for the relocation of the MSIR and numerous articles highlighting voices of 'politicians' focused on Premier Daniel Andrews 'backflip'. 'Overdose' statistics were featured highly within the dataset as were discursive 'descriptions of PWID' such as 'addicts', 'junkies', and 'druggies'.

Discussions and Conclusions: Despite people who inject drugs being the population MSIRs are designed to benefit, their experiences and voices were lacking, highlighting social power structures, denying the silenced power, and obstructing social change. Overdose rates were consistently presented as numbers, negating personal experiences and lacking meaningful debate. Further, the discursive discourse surrounding PWID may have implications regarding internalised and externalised stigma.

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