COMMUNITY WELLBEING, DRUG-RELATED CONCERNS, AND CRIME AROUND THE UK'S FIRST SANCTIONED SAFE DRUG CONSUMPTION FACILITY: REPEATED CROSS-SECTIONAL SURVEYS

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Abstract

Background:
Safer drug consumption facilities (SDCFs) aim to reduce harms among people who use drugs by providing supervised injecting environments and access to support services. In January 2025, the UK's first sanctioned SDCF, *The Thistle*, opened in Glasgow. While international evidence demonstrates benefits for people who use drugs, findings are mixed regarding potential impacts on neighbourhood social cohesion and safety. This study examined changes in community perceptions of social cohesion, drug- and crime-related concerns, and crime victimisation following the facility's opening.

Approach:
A quasi-experimental design with repeated cross-sectional surveys was applied to assess community-level outcomes. Data were collected from residents in the intervention area (Calton) and three comparison areas (Anderston, Bridgeton, and Parkhead) at pre (July–August 2024; n = 1,055) and post (July–August 2025; n = 1,113) intervention. The analysis was informed by public health and neighbourhood effects frameworks, considering how harm reduction interventions influence broader social environments. Fixed-effects regression models estimated intervention effects while controlling for sociodemographic differences between areas and temporal trends.

Analysis:
At pre, the intervention area reported higher drug-related concerns (β = 1.04, 95% CI 0.77–1.32), higher crime-related concerns (β = 0.24, 95% CI 0.00–0.47), and greater odds of crime victimisation (OR = 2.00, 95% CI 1.35–2.97). No overall temporal changes were observed across areas. However, a significant area-by-time interaction indicated increased social cohesion in the intervention area at post (β = 0.70, 95% CI 0.09–1.32) relative to control areas. No significant changes were found for other outcomes.

Conclusion:
The opening of *The Thistle* was not associated with substantial adverse community-level impacts. Although concerns about drugs and crime remained elevated, increased social cohesion suggests potential community benefits. These findings demonstrate the value of robust quasi-experimental evaluation methods and ongoing community engagement to support the successful integration of SDCFs.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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