

Identifying High-Priority Elements of Harm Reduction Practices in Japan: A Delphi Study

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Introduction: Japan's drug policy maintains a strict zero-tolerance stance. However, people who use drugs and healthcare professionals have recognized the importance of harm reduction (HR) approaches for treatment and community services in Japan. This study aimed to identify high-priority key elements of HR practices through a Delphi study.

Methods: Participants were people with lived and living experience of drug/alcohol use disorders, their family members, healthcare professionals, and researchers, and those who had knowledge of HR principles and practices, as well as existing treatment and community services in Japan. A two-round online Delphi survey was conducted using an 83-item list of key elements regarding HR practices, developed through a previous focus group interview study. Consensus was defined as 70% or more of respondents rating an item as "important" or "very important."

Results: Among the 87 participants, 67 responded to the first round (77.0%), and 58 (86.6%) completed the second round of the survey. Ultimately, consensus was reached on 65 items as high-priority key elements. Most of these items were included in the following categories: "mitigating potential harms within treatment and support environments," "framework establishment for providing HR practices," "essential skills and attitudes for practitioners," "infectious disease prevention and treatment," and "anti-stigma and human rights advocacy." In contrast, issues such as drug policy reform and specific strategies concerning how and by whom HR practices should be implemented were less likely to reach consensus.

Conclusions: The development of systems based on HR principles in treatment and community services, as well as initiatives to uphold human rights and protect the safety of people with lived and living experience, were considered important. Further discussion is needed to determine which practices should be implemented, who should deliver them, and how to ensure the safety of service users and providers within Japan's current drug policy context.

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