

Rapid assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people who inject drugs in Montreal, Canada



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Acknowledgements

This research was conducted in the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk) and the Abenaki and Wabanaki confederation

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Disclosures

- Julie Bruneau: Research grants from Gilead Sciences and Abbvie (unrelated to the present work), Canada Research Chair in Addiction Medicine, advisor fees from Gilead Sciences and Abbvie (unrelated to the present work)
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Background: COVID-19 & PWID

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations
- People who inject drugs (PWID)
 - ↑ risk of infection / mortality
 - ↑ risk of indirect harms of measures to curb viral spread



Objectives

Rapid assessment study:

- Examine the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of people who use drugs (3 Canadian sites)

This analysis:

- Impacts on access to housing, health services, and harm reduction among people who inject drugs (PWID) in Montreal



Questionnaire

- Informed by an existing review of health needs assessments in disaster contexts¹
- Most questions assessed a change since the pandemic was declared a health emergency in the province of Quebec, on March 13, 2020

¹ Korteweg et al. BMC Public Health. 2010 Jun 1;10:295.



Recruitment

May-June 2020

Active participants of an existing
cohort study of PWID



COHORTE

H.E.P.C.O.

Recherche · Personnes utilisant des substances · Santé



eligibility criteria: age ≥ 18 ; past-6-month injection drug use

Sep-Dec 2020



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People reporting past-
year illicit drug use
from community
service sites



Analyses

- Descriptive statistics, restricted to people reporting past-six-month injection drug use at the study visit.



Participant characteristics

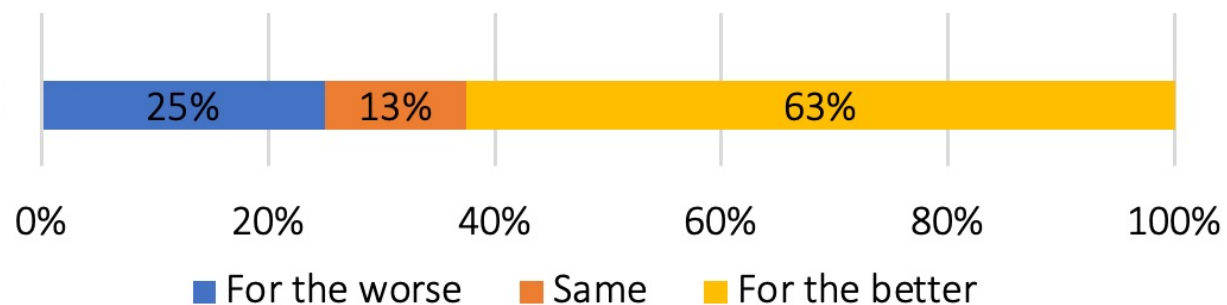
		Total (N=94)	
		n	%
Gender			
	<i>Male</i>	67	71%
	<i>Female</i>	26	28%
	<i>Other</i>	1	1%
Ethnicity			
	<i>White</i>	86	91%
	<i>Indigenous</i>	5	5%
	<i>Other / refusal</i>	3	3%
Recent unstable housing ¹		26	28%

¹Past six months in May-June, 6 months prior to the pandemic in Sep-Dec.



Housing

27%
(n=25) Experienced change in living situation since the start of the health emergency



Housing

13%
(n=12) reported that they had become homeless
as a result of the health emergency

91%
(n=21) of the unstably housed subset (n=23¹) reported that
finding a place to stay had become more difficult



¹Excluding 3 participants reporting don't know / not applicable to this question

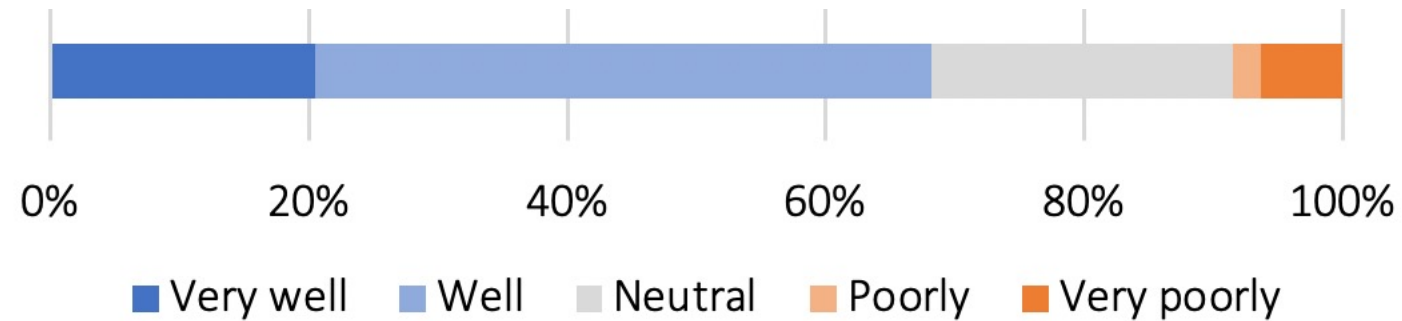
Opioid agonist treatment (OAT)

- 50 participants (53% of the sample) were on OAT at the time of the study interview
 - 19 (38%) had discussed strategies to avoid treatment disruptions with provider(s)
 - 10 (20%) had missed ≥ 1 dose due to service disruptions

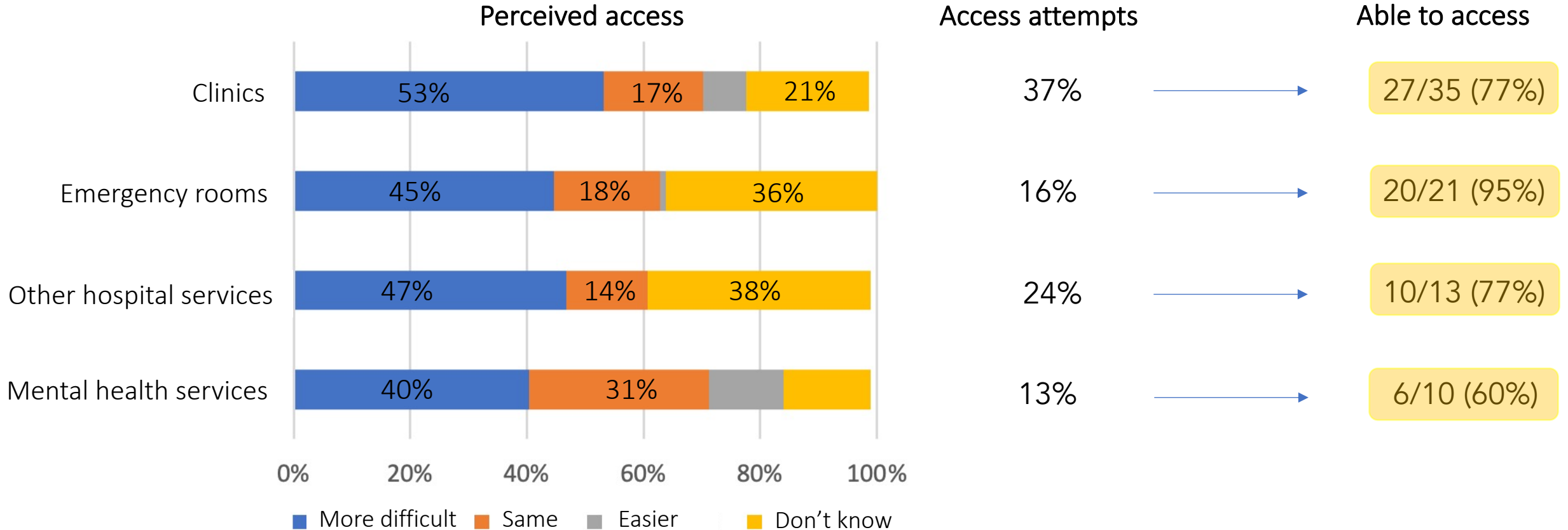


Satisfaction

With how medical team adapted to provide treatment during the health emergency...



Health services



Addiction / harm reduction services

Attempts to access since the start of the health emergency

Drug or alcohol
treatment



11% (n=9)

Naloxone



23% (95% able to access)

Needle-syringe
programs



79% (93% able to access)

Supervised
injection sites



45% (71% able to access)



Discussion

- Findings suggest mixed impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on PWID's ability to meet essential needs and services
- Access to sterile injection material seemed adequate during the assessed period; impacts on access to other harm reductions were less clear.
- Negative impacts on access to healthcare services may undermine overall health of PWID and set back HCV elimination efforts
- Limited access to housing may increase exposure to high risk environments and exacerbate existing harms among the most vulnerable; responses should be tailored to reach this group
- Continued monitoring is warranted



Limitations

- Convenience sample
- Study is a snapshot of perceptions / experiences up to December 2020
 - 2021 curfew not captured



Collaborators & Funding

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