

## **Needle exchange staff perspectives and knowledge about the injection of performance and image enhancing drugs, and the clients using these substances**

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**Introduction:** Needle and syringe exchange is traditionally associated with people who inject (PWI) opioids and stimulant drugs; increasingly, however, a significant proportion of clients inject performance and image enhancing drugs (PIEDs). The New Zealand Needle Exchange Programme (NZNEP) is a peer-based service, but the staff mainly inject (or previously injected) opioids or stimulants. This research aimed to explore staff understanding of PIED use, their experiences interacting with PWIPIEDs, and reveal staff training needs.

**Methods:** All NZNEP staff who service clients were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's framework<sup>1</sup>.

**Results:** Sixteen staff at eight NZNEP exchanges were interviewed and reported that needle exchange transactions involving PWIPIEDs were frequent. Participants expressed confidence in their knowledge of PIED injecting equipment and their recognition of injection-specific injuries. However, participants reported less knowledge of PIEDs, including drug actions, use patterns, outcomes and specific risks. They also reported lacking confidence in interacting with PWIPIEDs. Notably, a 'clash of injecting cultures' emerged as a major theme. NZNEP staff viewed PWIPIEDs as non-traditional clients about whom they knew relatively little and whom they perceived lacked confidence in NZNEP staff knowledge. We also uncovered clashes relating to drug injecting for "healthy purposes" versus "unhealthy" recreational drug injecting.

**Discussions and Conclusions:** Our findings provide evidence for the need for NZNEP staff training and the inclusion of PWIPIEDs in service development. Our research indicates the need to further explore identified "cultural clashes" with PWIPIEDs.

**Implications for Practice or Policy:** This study's identification of a neglected priority population atypical of the NZNEP's traditional client base provides the impetus to employ PIEDs experienced staff and develop PIEDs specific training and services. This is consonant with the NZ Ministry of Health's recently signalled preference for an expanded harm reduction service.

<sup>1</sup>. Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3(2):77-101

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