

A Review of Harm Reduction Approaches in Ireland and Evidence from the International Literature (2004)

Research conducted by:

Gerry Moore et al., School of Nursing, Dublin City University.

Aim:

To review the national and international literature on Harm Reduction; to review services available in Ireland.

Method:

A comprehensive literature review and an exploratory empirical study was undertaken to obtain information from service providers. A definition of harm reduction was used as follows: “Harm reduction means to prevent or reduce negative health consequences associated with certain perceived harmful behaviours. In relation to drug misuse, harm reduction interventions aim to prevent transmission of HIV and other infections (Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C) that occur through sharing of non-sterile drug-taking equipment (such as syringes, spoons, pipes and filters)”.

Key Findings:

- Harm reduction methods are being used in Ireland but there is significant scope to expand the role of drug services in delivering flexible and responsive initiatives to target shared use of equipment amongst drug users.
- Those at greater risk of infection are young drug users, those with a shorter injecting history, those in an intimate relationship with another injecting drug user, those incarcerated in prison and the homeless.
- Harm reduction strategies could benefit the health of the most marginalized groups (the homeless, those in prison, women involved in prostitution) in society.
- Restricted opening hours and limited numbers of needle exchange services may actually contribute to the sharing of equipment, leading to further health risks.

- Sharing of equipment occurs where access to harm reduction services is limited, poor or not available.
- Harm reduction messages need to highlight risks of sharing any equipment such as spoons, water, filters as well as needles and syringes and promote safer ways of using drugs.

NACD Recommendations to Government:

- Needle exchange programmes (NEPs) should be significantly expanded on a countrywide basis by providing services outside of normal working hours and at weekends including the provision and/or exchange of a range of drug use paraphernalia.
- The role of community pharmacy-based NEPs should be developed in line with best practice in other countries, following appropriate consultation.
- There is a need for enhanced training for service providers and this report should be brought to the attention of all those involved in the planning and provision of these services.
- Service provision for drug users in prison should mirror the range of treatment and harm reduction-related approaches which are available in the community.
- The NACD recommends that the effectiveness and experience of supervised drug consumption rooms should continue to be monitored. However, the NACD acknowledges the view of the INCB (International Narcotics Control Board) that drug consumption rooms violate the provisions of the International Drug Control Conventions to which Ireland is a party.