



The Mobile Access Project (MAP) Van: Drugs, Detoxification & Sex Work in Vancouver

Background

Studies of injection drug users have shown that outreach programs using harm reduction principles can provide a critical entry point to health and social services, however little is known about how effective peer (sex worker)-led outreach programs are for women in street-based sex work.

The Question

How effective is the MAP van in helping women in street-based sex work access and utilize addiction treatment?

The Study

Maka project and Gender & Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) researchers conducted an **18-month study among a sample of 242 women in street based sex work who use drugs in Vancouver, BC**, as part of an ongoing ethnographic and qualitative study on working conditions, health and safety in the sex industry led by GSHI/BCCfE and UBC in collaboration with a range of community partners. It aimed to examine the use of the mobile access project (MAP) van, a peer-led outreach project staffed by current and former sex workers established in 2003 by WISH Drop-In and PACE Society in response to high rates of violence and health-related harms among street-based sex workers, Sex workers participated in this study as research team members and co-authors.

The Results

Women who use the MAP van were more likely to:

- Be over age 25;
- Have a higher number (+10) weekly clients;
- Have injected cocaine in the last 6 months;
- Work in isolated areas;
- Have accessed inpatient addiction treatment & residential drug treatment.

Link between exposure to the outreach program and drug treatment:

- 202 (42.2%) reported using the MAP van
- 61 (33.6%) reported outpatient treatment
- 45 (9.4%) reported inpatient treatment
- Those using MAP van services were 4 times more likely to access detox and/or inpatient addiction treatment

The Implications

- The study shows that peer-based mobile outreach is an important strategy for facilitating access to and utilization of addiction treatment services for the most marginalized women in sex work.
- Younger sex workers were much less likely to access the MAP van and often face multiple barriers to accessing health services, showing a need for mobile access programs specifically tailored for youth.
- Hours of operation of health and outreach services, and availability of sex worker-specific services, play a role in utilization of addiction treatment and should be expanded.
- The study suggests interventions should focus on harm reduction, prevention and treatment for women in sex work, not enforcement and criminalization, which further marginalize them.

Deering KN, Kerr T, Tyndall MW, Montaner JS, Gibson K, Irons L, Shannon K. A peer-led mobile outreach program and increased utilization of detoxification and residential drug treatment among female sex workers who use drugs in a Canadian setting. *Drug Alcohol Depend.* 2011 Jan 1;113(1):46-54.