

Abstract

Towards A Praxis of Dignity Promotion: Critical Reflections on Dignity in Harm Reduction Practice With People Who Use Drugs in Canada by Madeline Bentham

This exploratory, qualitative study sought to examine harm reduction workers' understandings of dignity as it relates to their practice with people who use drugs amidst the devastating effects of Canada's ongoing opioid overdose crisis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four harm reduction workers to explore conceptualizations of dignity, including socio-structural sites of dignity violation and transformative dignity-promoting practice approaches. Findings indicate the unique propensity of harm reduction approaches to promote dignity through centring self-determination, non-judgement, and power-sharing approaches. However, participants indicated severe structural constraints limiting the emancipatory potential of harm reduction work and creating ongoing experiences of ethical tension for practitioners and dignity violation for people who use drugs. Intersectional sites of dignity violation were identified including pervasive stigma and discrimination, structural violence related to homelessness, poverty, and exclusion, and the discriminatory harms of the medical model.