

OST futures: integrating the user's experience into person-centred care.

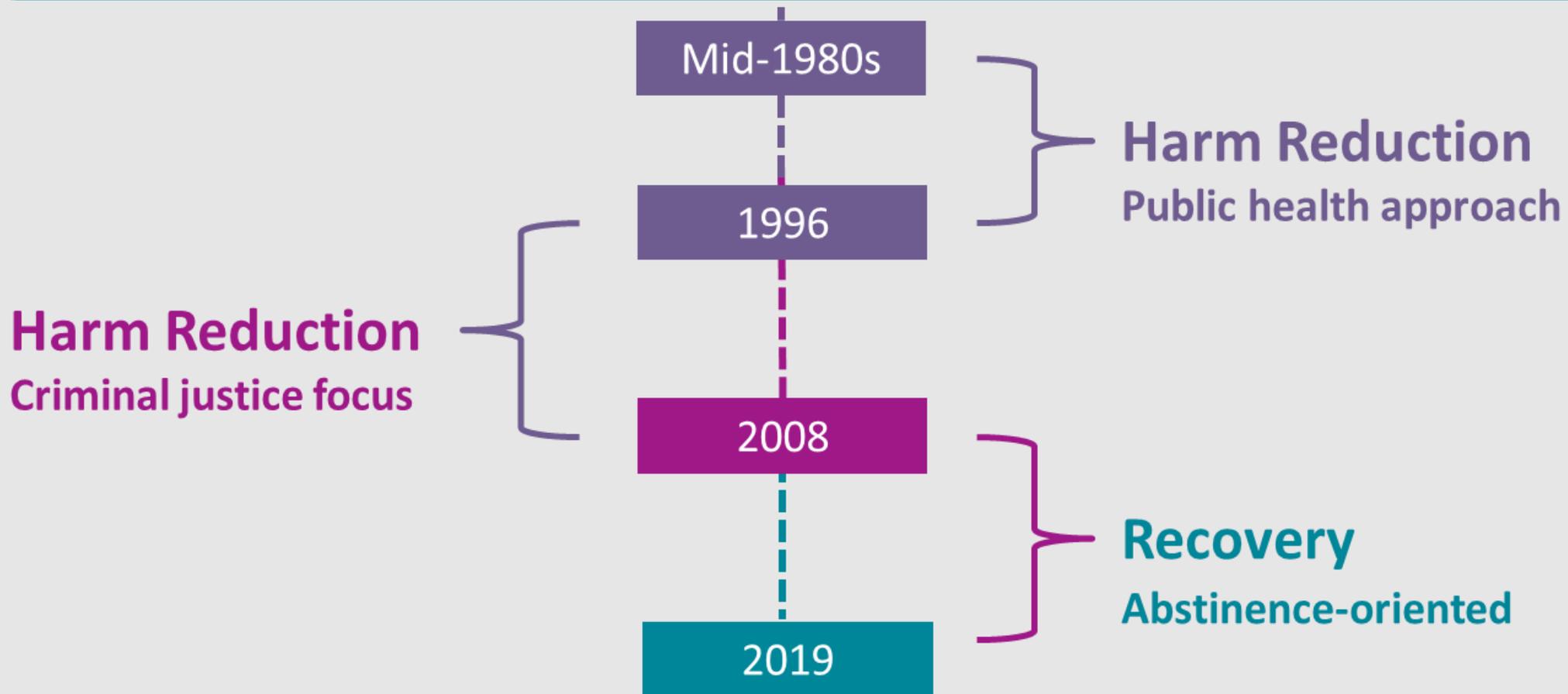
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From Harm Reduction to Abstinence: Scotland's 'Road to Recovery'



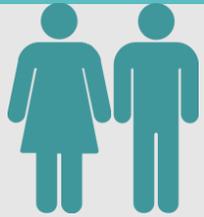
Scottish Drugs Strategy 2008-2018

“a process through which an individual is enabled to move-on from their problem drug use towards a drug-free life and become an active and contributing member of society”

Aim of Study

explore the experience and perspectives of recovery by people on OST (methadone) in an abstinence-focussed policy & practice environment

Methods



Male or female

25+

Aged over 25



Receiving methadone for 2+ years



Self-identify as being in recovery



Able to give informed consent



Previously keyworked by the field worker

Inclusion

Exclusion

- 19 participants (10 female, 9 male) recruited from diverse sites across Glasgow.
- Interview schedule co-produced with people who had current or previous experience of methadone treatment and recovery

The meaning of recovery

Recovery to me, I get up, I waken up every morning, I can smile, I'm a **functioning person**, you know? When things do come up I don't fold like a deck of cards, I can handle them, live everyday people. (Neil)

at the start [of MMT] I would have thought it would have been abstinence, drug-free, but the more I got into it and tried to reduce on my meth and get involved in recovery cafes and other stuff...I realised it wasn't for me. It's about my **mental health**. If my mental health isn't in a good place my recovery never will be. (Jackie)

Role of methadone: ambivalent views

Methadone might be a substitute for heroin but in the long run methadone's worse than heroin, it sinks into your arteries, blocks out emotion
(Ian)

Methadone is my recovery.... I wouldn't be sitting here without methadone (Neil)

I can't praise it enough.... it really got me back on my feet, and it changed my life for the better, it made me healthy again, I managed to financially get a grip of myself, you know? all the things you start losing control of when you're addicted
(David)

Abstinence and being 'normal' / 'clean'

I've still got that wee thing in the back of my head saying no, I'm no exactly **clean**, you know? ... like if you went to fellowship and that I wouldn't be seen as being in recovery, erm, because I'm still on medication.

(Jackie)

To move on, be able to hold down a **normal** job, feel like an **equal**
(Marie)

Being in recovery is like **total abstinent** off drugs. Methadone as well... Because you see so many people clean and you want that... I'm trying to recover (Claire)

Influence of abstinence-oriented policy on practice

if you're on methadone they don't deal with your mental health ... it's all risk assessment, referrals, case notes ... GPs won't link you in with mental health services if you're on methadone – it's like a **blocker to accessing other services.** (Tracey)

he'll give me every bit of help that I need and that. It's down to me, how much I come down and when I come down, and if I want to stop, **it's entirely down to me** (Alex)

I think it will happen **when I'm ready** for it. I'm cutting down because I want to cut down, you know? Not because you're telling me or because I feel I need to (Neil)

I've always used on top of my methadone ... I've said to my CAT worker I don't know how many times, **I want to come off this...** It's as if they want you to not come off it at all, they just want to keep giving you it (Pauline)

Methadone stigma

A lot of people do **judge** because I see a lot of people going into the chemist, and I hear people going 'look at the mad junkie in getting their methadone', you know, the green mile... people are coming in and looking at you, it's as if they look kind of a down on you. And it's no nice, it's embarrassing.

(Marie)

As soon as you mention you're on a script, it's like, god forgive me, it's like saying you've got fucking - years ago, you've got HIV, maybe no as big as that but in the recovery world its along they same lines, you know? It's, **it's as if you've got the plague or something** (Neil)

I don't tend to let anybody else know about it... that I'm on methadone, it's a bad stigma to it. **I'm embarrassed about it** (Alex)

Resistance

There's so many different opinions within the recovery world. Some people think like even on anti-depressants you are nae clean you know, and I used to just grab onto what everybody else thought and then measure myself against that whereas now ... I now think it's **what I think that's important, it's how I measure myself**, by being a mum, by being a daughter, by being - how my life is, you know? **no by how many mil of methadone I'm taking.**

(Jackie)

Discussion

- Recovery was a uniquely experienced and fluid concept incorporating a broad range of factors beyond substance use - improved (mental) health and relationships.
- Participants internalised the rhetoric of the abstinence-oriented agenda -> cognitive dissonance \inconsistent views about abstinence as recovery
- Views of MMT were shaped by their experience of stigma within drug treatment services - from their care providers and 'abstinent' peers' disapproval of their long-term participation in MMT.

Discussion

- Tension between clinical practice of methadone prescribing with a focus on harm-reduction, and the ideology of abstinence-oriented treatment services and mutual aid
- Designated 'unclean' status affected, for example, their access to ancillary services such as mental health and trauma support and group talk therapies.
- As a result, broader mental health and social needs remained unaddressed.
- Participants expressed feelings of disempowerment with little input into their care plan
- Participants not awarded recovery status by their abstinent peers, in treatment services and in wider society

Conclusion

- The results suggest a level of cognitive dissonance among the study participants in relation to their contradictory experience of MMT. On the one hand they appreciated its role in improving their health and well-being and managing their substance use; on the other hand, they experienced stigma, exclusion and isolation within the ROSC drug treatment services as a result of their ongoing MMT.
- The study's results highlight how the efficacy of long-term MMT may be compromised within the abstinence expectation context of a Recovery-Oriented System of Care and indicate the need for person-centred care and integrated service provision to address needs.