

# Past Experiences Of Stigma Shaping Present Perceptions Of Healthcare Among People Who Inject Drugs Living With Hepatitis C

Goutzamanis S<sup>1,2</sup>, Doyle JS<sup>1,3</sup>, Thompson A<sup>4,5</sup>, Dietze P<sup>1,2</sup>, Hellard M<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Higgs P<sup>1,6</sup> on behalf of the TAP study group

## BACKGROUND



Stigma is “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance”  
- Goffman 1963

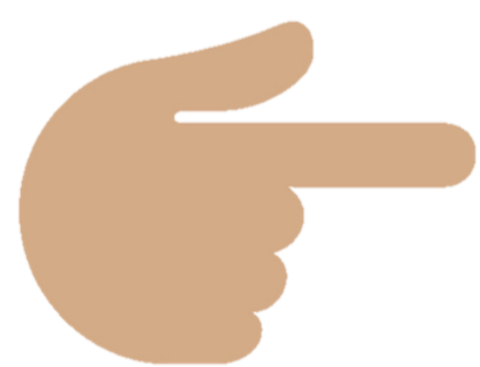
- People who inject drugs living with hepatitis C commonly report experiencing stigma and discrimination
- Stigma may decrease physical and mental health, quality of life and feelings of intimacy

## AIMS

- Explore hepatitis C diagnosis experience among people who inject drugs
- Explore the impact of negative diagnosis experience on perceptions and attitudes towards healthcare

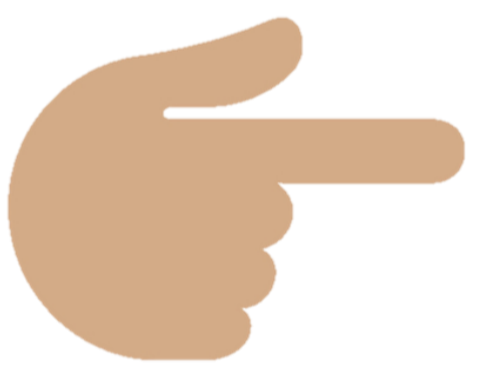
## METHODS

### TAP STUDY



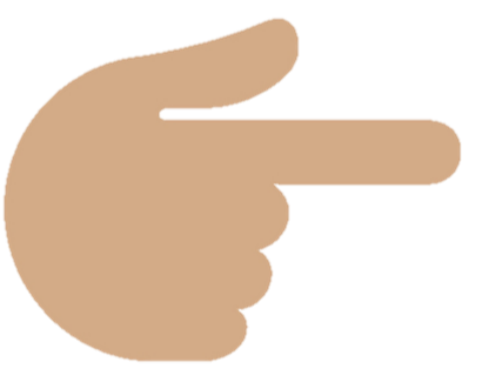
- Treatment and Prevention (TAP) study explores feasibility of treating community-based cohort of Hepatitis C mono-infected people who inject drugs

### SUB SAMPLE



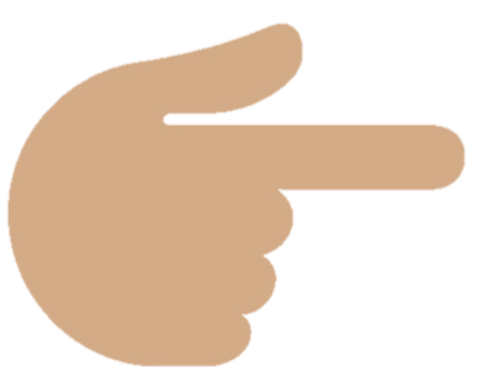
- Purposive sample, stratified based on age and gender
- n= 16

### INTERVIEWS



- In-depth interviews
- Open-ended questions, focussing on the impact of health status on wellbeing

### ANALYSIS



- Transcripts voice recorded, transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed

## RESULTS

Participants were...

- 33 – 56 yrs old
- Predominantly male (n=11)
- Mostly unemployed (n=15)
- Mostly diagnosed ≥ 10 yrs ago (n=10)
- All untreated at interview

- Most participants recalled their diagnosis in the context of stigma and discrimination

Just stigma and discrimination sh\*t from the doctor; “Oh you are drug user, and you are itchy and you’ve got hepatitis”.  
(Female, aged 33)

- These participants did not return to their diagnosing provider as they felt “shameful”, deeply hurt and treated unfairly

[My doctor] lost me...[the receptionists] were whispering and I said; “I’m still here! You speak to me out loud!”  
(Male, aged 48)

- Negative diagnosis experience contributed to a lasting impression of healthcare services as unapproachable and unsupportive

[Doctors] come down here and look after us junkies but then they go over there and they look after the normal people, so they don’t really don’t want to hear about our problems, they want to hear about theirs.  
(Male, aged 54)

- For some, negative diagnosis experience was so impactful they remained disengaged from formal healthcare

[The doctor] didn’t explain a thing! Nothing! Just “you’ve got Hep C, see you later”. I felt betrayed by everyone. I don’t go there anymore. I don’t go anywhere.  
(Female, aged 44)

## CONCLUSIONS

- Despite improved treatment and care, past experiences of stigma may contribute to negative perceptions of healthcare and promote anticipation of stigma in a healthcare setting

Contact: Stelliana Goutzamanis | [Stelliana.goutzamanis@burnet.edu.au](mailto:Stelliana.goutzamanis@burnet.edu.au)

<sup>1</sup>Disease Elimination Program, Burnet Institute, <sup>2</sup>School of Population Health and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, <sup>3</sup>Department of Infectious Diseases, Alfred Health, <sup>4</sup>Department of Gastroenterology, St Vincent’s Hospital, <sup>5</sup>Department of Medicine, University of Melbourne, <sup>6</sup>Department of Public Health, La Trobe University