

Piloting Mock-ups, Presentations of Evidence, and Q&As as Tools to Help Participants Voice their Opinions During Focus Groups and Interviews about Supervised Injection Services.

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- **Background:** Supervised injection services (SIS) prevent HIV infection among people who use drugs by providing a space to use pre-obtained drugs, access to sterile injection equipment, harm reduction education and referrals to health and social services.
- **Challenge:** Organizations may conduct feasibility studies to assess community stakeholders' acceptance of SIS before deciding to implement these services, which can be an issue due to the controversial nature of these facilities in some communities.
- In such studies, researchers may experience challenges facilitating participants' expression of their opinions regarding SIS because available information about SIS tends to conflict, and participants' experiences and knowledge with SIS are limited.
- SIS feasibility studies often use verbal descriptions and pictures to inform participants about SIS, but in our research, we have found that participants were still hesitant to express their opinions when we used these tools.
- **Response:** we created and piloted the use of “grounding aids”—tools, objects, and methods used before qualitative data collection to provide participants with knowledge of, and experience with, SIS—within a feasibility study of a hospital-based SIS.



Conflict of Interest Disclosure: we have no conflicts of interest

Methods

Casey House SIS Feasibility Study

- We collaborated with Casey House, a Toronto-based specialty HIV hospital, that led a feasibility study of SIS for its clients on its premises.
- In this feasibility study we hosted 10 focus groups with a total of 70 stakeholders and one-on-one interviews with 8 inpatients to explore opinions about SIS acceptability.
- Stakeholder focus groups included day health program clients (there was an opposed/undecided about SIS group and a supportive of SIS group), board members, managers, volunteers, day health program staff, inpatient clinical staff, and non-clinical staff.



Casey House, a Toronto-based specialty HIV hospital

Embedded in Casey House SIS Feasibility Study: Pilot Study of Grounding Aids

- **Sub-study objective:** To evaluate feasibility study participants' experience with grounding aids
- Before interviews and focus groups, participants were introduced to three grounding aids—a physical mock-up of an SIS, a presentation regarding SIS, and a Q&A with SIS staff—to help ground their understanding of SIS.
- We asked additional questions in the interviews and focus groups about participants' experience with these grounding aids and whether they felt the aids were an attempt to sway their opinions about SIS.
- These discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Grounding aids and Procedures

Physical Mock-up of SIS

- A series of rooms were mocked up within the hospital with furnishings and equipment resembling those found in SIS spaces (see images on the right). Facilitators provided a guided walkthrough of the mock-SIS for approximately 25 minutes to mirror the typical flow of a client arriving and wanting to use SIS from being directed into the waiting room by staff to moving on to the injection room.

Presentation regarding SIS

- Participants were then shown photographs of, and listened to a presentation about, SIS operating in Canada and internationally. We presented a summary of the scientific literature about the known outcomes, common concerns and the number and types of SIS operating in Canada and elsewhere.

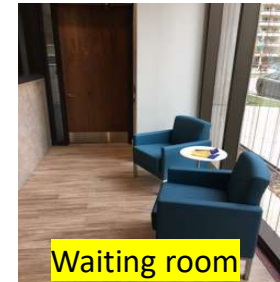
Q&A with SIS staff

- Staff members from a local Toronto SIS spoke about the operations at their sites, including the number of visits per day, the perceived benefits to their clients, what information they gathered from clients, hours of operation, onsite overdose statistics and clients' self-reported needs. Participants were encouraged to ask questions throughout the information/education session.

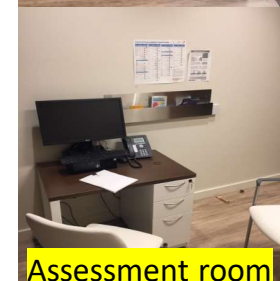


Please note: all parts of the study were conducted before COVID-19 social distancing restrictions.

Rooms in the Mock-up of SIS



Waiting room



Assessment room



Injection room

Results: focus groups & interviews

Overall, most participants said the grounding aids helped them express their opinions without feeling swayed by the research team. One focus group with clients who were selected because they were opposed to or undecided about SIS and a manager from another group felt that the aids were biased, but they did not change their opinions.

Participant's reflections on how grounding aids helped them included:

- Helped experience unfamiliar features of SIS visually and concretely.
- Served as a cue for questions and as a reference during focus group discussions.
- Helped them understand SIS and its operations from the point of view of clients and/or staff members.

Recommendations for improving the grounding aids included:

- Bring the SIS mock-up experience even closer to the reality of SIS operation (e.g., using a video of a functional site).
- Opposed/undecided about SIS focus group: Add evidence against SIS implementation into the presentations of research (which did not exist in the way requested).

Example quotes:

About the mock-up: "You know, going down and seeing that upfront, I'm a concrete person. I'm a visual person... when you show me something, and then you link it with those pictures there, that helps me a great deal, yeah." [Volunteer focus group]

About the Presentations: "... I think I've been able to refine my concerns and thoughts more in this process [of asking questions during the presentation], than I would have [without it]." [Managers focus group 2]

About the Q&As: "it [the Q&A] shows us what the people, like the peers and the nurses would be like, [what] they'd be doing when it [the SIS] comes here, right. And that really personalized it and made it effective. Made me see how it could work for us." [Client focus group 2 – supportive of SIS]

Discussion

- **Participants were less hesitant to share opinions than in our previous SIS feasibility studies and could identify how the grounding aids helped them.**
 - Participants who had negative opinions about SIS before the study did not change those opinions during the study.
 - Participants with negative opinions criticized the use of grounding aids believing we had presented only positive evidence about SIS. All other participants did not feel that grounding aids were biased.
 - Since we did not have a comparison group, **it is hard to know if the method helped reduce hesitancy to express opinions or if the group was just less hesitant and/or knowledgeable about SCS from the start.**
 - **Embodied cognition research** suggests that thinking and cognition are grounded in bodily actions which **may explain why the grounding aids—particularly the SIS mock-up— helped to reduce hesitancy to voice opinions** more so than verbal and visual depictions of SIS used in prior studies.
- **Grounding aids are promising tools to reduce participant hesitancy. Future research is needed to assess their impact more rigorously.**



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