

Designing a Study to Incorporate Meaningful Co-design and Co-production Principles with Women Who Use Drugs.

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Background and Context

Alongside austerity, a decade of neoliberal approaches to commissioning English drug and alcohol services has left the treatment sector fragmented and ‘on its knees’ (1).

Over the past decade, evidence shows an increasing tendency to commission contracts delivered by larger organisations at the expense of smaller providers. The use of New Public Management (NPM) approaches in commissioning has meant that often ecosystems of provision were replaced by the single provider model (2).

Alongside this, latest statistics (2022) show that of the in-treatment population only 27.6% were women and that women’s drug related deaths continue to rise while men’s drug related deaths have stabilised (3).

There is limited research around the impact of NPM on the sector, the people who use services and in particular women. This research seeks to address the gap in the literature.

Methodology

The research will be qualitative and focus on harm reduction services as these are the ‘front door’ of treatment services. An in-depth case comparative study will be conducted in two areas.

One has an ecosystem of providers.

The other has a single provider model, where all drug and alcohol services are delivered in-house.

Research Questions

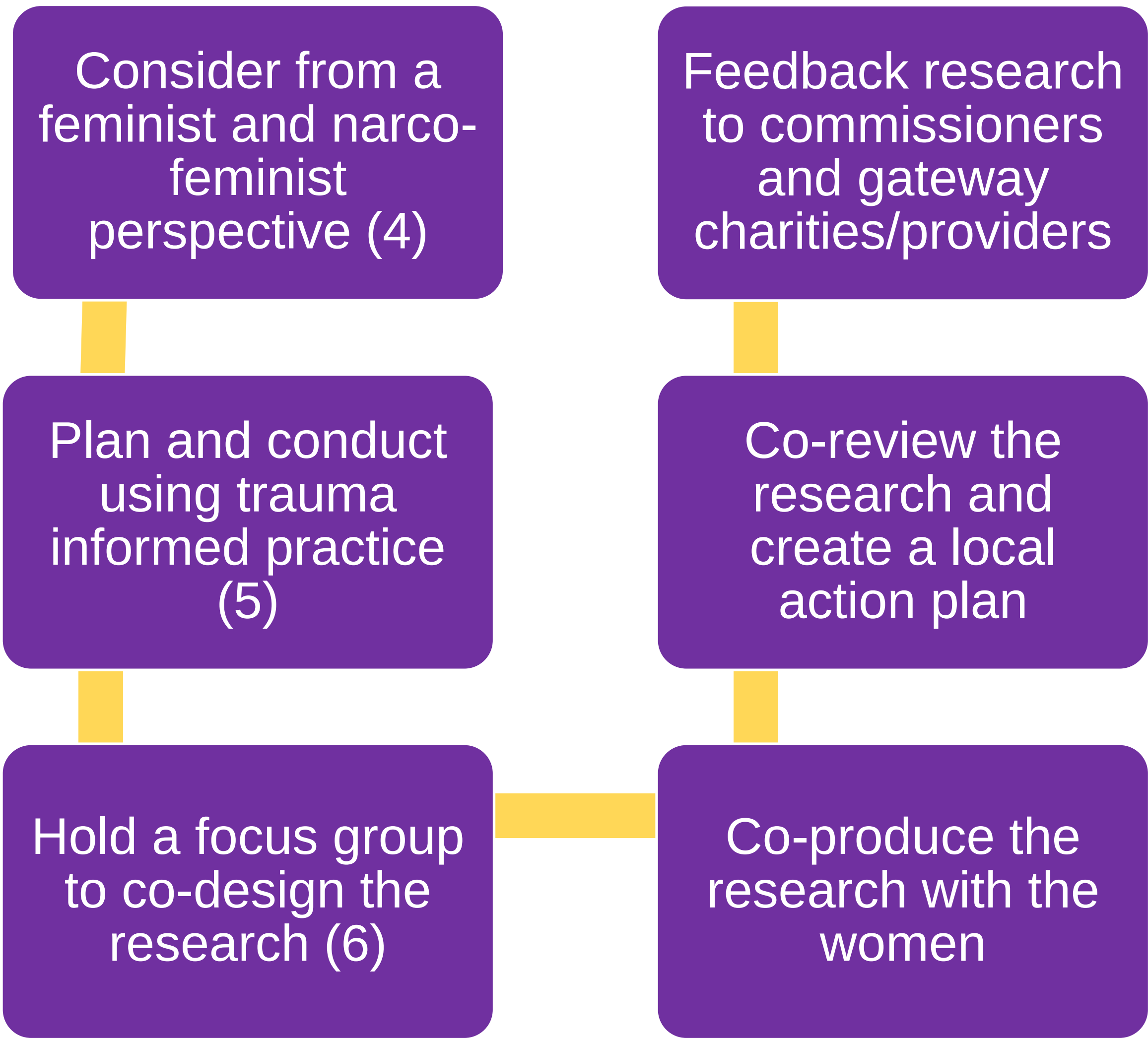
- 15 women in each area, who are using or have previously used heroin and or crack cocaine will answer the following questions
- What are women’s current experiences of accessing harm reduction services?
 - Do women face any barriers in accessing harm reduction services, and if so, how can they be overcome?
- Commissioners in each area will also be asked:
- To what extent, if any, has the increasing domination of large providers of drug and alcohol treatment affected women’s access to harm reduction services?

Stakeholder Feedback

A group of women who use heroin and crack cocaine provided the following guidance on the research design, which has been incorporated as per the flow chart below.



Research Design



Summary

This research will adopt a trauma informed approach and use meaningful co-design and co-production principles with women who use drugs. It seeks to fill a gap in understanding women’s barriers to accessing services and whether this has been impacted by changes in commissioning processes driven by NPM between 2012 and 2022. Findings will have implications for both policy and practice.

