

THE CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS ACCESSING PRESCRIBED SAFER SUPPLY IN BC, CANADA 2020-2021.

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BACKGROUND

In 2020, the Government of British Columbia (BC) implemented prescribed safer supply (PSS) to reduce toxic drug deaths that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. The toxic drug supply crisis has devastating and intergenerational impacts on families and kinship networks. While evidence of these programs is emerging, no studies to date have explored the unique factors and experiences associated with PSS among parents.

RESULTS

Between October 2020-2021, 352 survey participants completed a cross-sectional survey. Of whom, 111 (31.5%) reported children under age 19. Half (50.5%) of parents and 62.2% of non-parents were men, 59.5% and 30.6% identified as Indigenous, and 57.5% and 52.7% were stably housed, respectively. Most (68.5% of parents and 74.2% of non-parents) had ever accessed PSS. Many barriers were commonly reported by both parents and non-parents, including: 1) mistrust of healthcare providers, 2) past negative interactions and feeling unsafe in clinics, 3) beliefs that PSS will not be able to meet needs, 4) lack of knowledge of where to access PSS, 5) perceived costs, and 6) concerns surrounding COVID-19. The only significant difference was that parents were more likely to report being too busy as a barrier to PSS compared to non-parents (41.4% vs. 25.4%, $p=0.003$).

Parenting-specific motivations in seeking PSS

“I don’t ever want... my son to see me sick. Ever” (2565)

“I don’t want to die over this. [...] I don’t want to leave that legacy for my kids” (2524)

“I’d like to get back to a point in my life where I can be a functioning part of my daughter’s life” (3827).

Parenting-specific barriers to PSS

“I slipped and said I was on methadone to a social worker[...] She kind of went from there and decided that she’d better open up a file [...] it was just like ‘Really? Because I’m being honest? So what you want me to do is lie to you?’ So that’s why I don’t trust anybody. I just have a hard time trusting anybody” (2890)

“I was so busy working and family and stuff that I had missed two days [of dispensations]” (2565)

DISCUSSION

Parents reported motivations for pursuing PSS such as taking a more active role in their children’s lives and mitigating potential child exposure to harm from an increasingly toxic drug supply by having access to a prescribed alternative. Our research underlines the significance of time demands as a barrier and highlights the potential consequence that parents may disengage from care and PSS. Thematic analysis revealed past experiences of drug use stigma from providers, fear of child apprehension/child welfare involvement, and a lack of child-inclusive substance use services as parenting-specific barriers to PSS and substance use care.

These findings underline the need to address stigmatizing, punitive responses to families experiencing substance use and support approaches that are parent-centred and inclusive of the family across a continuum of care.

