

The Professionalization of Harm Reduction in the U.S.: Historical Analysis and Field Interventions

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Research Question

How has the professionalization of harm reduction impacted people who use drugs from its introduction in the U.S. in the 1980s, and what are the implications for harm reduction trainings in the field?

Timeline of Key Events Leading to Professionalization of Harm Reduction in the U.S.

1961	1968	1971	1989	1993
United Nations Convention on Narcotic Drugs	Nixon declares the “War on Drugs”	Black Panther Party (BPP) Coalition goes to China for acupuncture training & Young Lords implementation at Lincoln Detox Center	Women with a Vision establish in New Orleans, LA	First Needle Exchange Program (NEP) established by Dave Purchase in Tacoma, WA

Methods

2 key informant semi-structured interviews; used convenience sampling; transcription completed through Zoom & OtterAI technology; thematic analysis undertaken by primary researcher (A. de Niz Cruz) and [Dr. Margot Abels](#) (Northeastern University)

Subject Information

- Tanagra Malgarejo Pulido (she/her)-National Director of Capacity Building & Engagement at National Harm Reduction Coalition
- Joseph (Joe) Chafins (he/him)- Lead Harm Reduction Case Manager at Shattuck Shelter Pine Street Inn

THEME	SIGNIFICANT QUOTES (TM for Tanajara Malgarejo and JC for Joe Chafins)
Lived Experience (LE)	“Cause at the end of the day, you know, it is people that necessarily don’t always have those experiences with, you know, doctors and nurses, and you know, and things like that that are talking on it. And it’s better to I think, actually have, like an understanding of of what it means.” (JC)
Infrastructural Support (I)	“So we, you know Pine Street has done, and I myself have talked to landlords and property managers, and then, like we can install Narcan in the hallways on the walls, or, you know, make sure they have them in-unit, that kind of stuff.” (JC)
Accessibility of Resources (A)	“So many people are able to go and get to treatment if they want to do harm reduction because they trust us. And they trust harm reduction programs to help bridge those gaps and support them in that process. And we work with people where they’re at, but we’re not, that’s not our expectation.” (TM)
Community Care (C)	“And the history of this movement isn’t the Young Lords, it’s in the Black Panthers, right, in the American Indian Movement, it’s in a Feminist Movement and Black Feminist Movement that you know, and it’s in bell hooks, and it’s in Loretta Ross and all the work that Loretta Ross and other fellow feminist Black feminists Brown feminists have done around reproductive justice, because our movement is rooted in that right, like, and so we need to continue to bring that in and share with folks and help them make those connections.” (TM)
Systems of Oppression (O)	“There’s a lot I felt like stigmatization around harm reduction and the layers that are within harm reduction that are, you know, I’m thinking, like certain areas of Boston, certain towns, certain neighborhoods. You know the racist elements that go into the stigmatization of certain cultures, you know, and that kind of stuff.” (JC)

Recommendations

- Accountability-Oriented framework naming & confronting unmet obligations of institutionalized harm reduction infrastructure (Lopez et. al 2021)
- Implementation of Community Advisory Councils (CACs)
- Historical Overview of Grassroots Workshop [30-45 minute training focused on the historical roots of the movement & community archiving activity]

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