

Living Under COVID-19 and Injecting Drugs in Bristol (LUCID-B)

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Background

People Who Inject Drugs (PWID) are a high-risk group for COVID virus transmission.

Many services had to rapidly alter their provision; the consequences for PWID of these rapid changes were unknown

In collaboration with Bristol Drugs Project, we explored

- Challenges faced by PWID during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Their experiences of drug use and service delivery

LUCID-B team



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Dr Hannah Family



Dr Adam Holland



Dr Myles-Jay Linton



Dr Jenny Scott

Methods

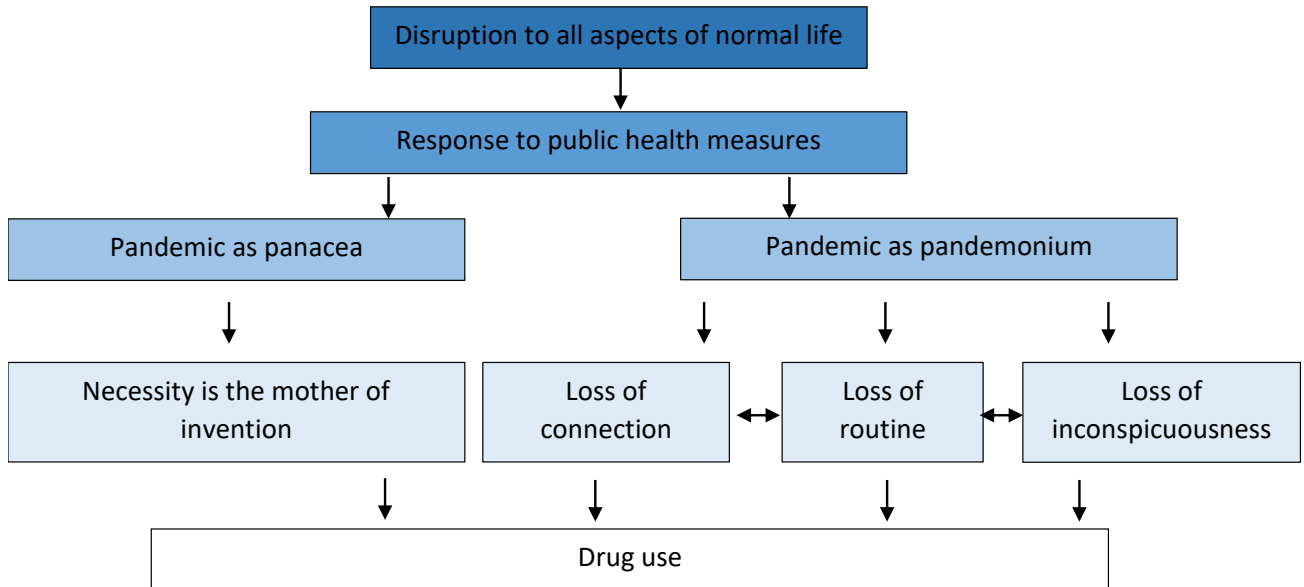
- Participants recruited by BDP staff
 - Home delivery
 - Street outreach
 - Hostel outreach
 - Doorstep service
- Qualitative interviews conducted by researchers over the phone
- Participants injecting drugs at start of lockdown (23rd March), and over age 18
- Interviews conducted 11th June – 5th August
- Rapid framework analysis and ongoing thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013)

Sample

- 28 participants
- Nine (32%) female
- 15 (54%) via outreach
- 23 (82%) were receiving opioid substitution therapy (OST)
- 19 (67%) were in emergency accommodation
- Age 25-54

Findings overview

Candidate overarching themes, themes and subthemes



Disruption to normal life

General changes to service provision

- Rapid prescribing
- 1 -2 week OST prescriptions
- No face-to-face meetings

Bristol Drugs Project

- Home delivery of NSP
- Doorstep collection of NSP
- Support services switched to online

Pandemic as panacea

There's actually been bonuses to it [COVID-19]. Like I mean having more attention from services and stuff. That's how it's felt, like they've cared more about our welfare.

EH0884, female



Pandemic as panacea

Necessity is the mother of invention... for drug services

OST changes

- Positive views on switch to non-daily pick up
- Positive views on rapid prescribing

You're told you've got to commit another three weeks of crimes because you've got to fund this habit, but if you're told actually we can just do it in the next couple of days (...) That's the only thing which I think would be really useful to stay *KMT0946, female*

BDP changes

Home delivery and street outreach of NSP viewed favourably

We were really lucky with that, with Bristol Drugs Project doing [needle and syringe delivery] for us
CE0872, female

Pandemic as panacea



Necessity is the mother of invention... for housing

“Everyone in”

Some reported being grateful, and hopeful housing support would continue.

Many reported worry over the uncertainty of future housing provision, and over returning to the streets.

Eviction fears as result of drug use.

Pandemic as pandemonium

Loss of connection

Mental health worsened by boredom and isolation

Remote service provision, and issues with lack of phone or internet for some

For a few, the isolation did not differ from their pre-pandemic lives.

They say the opposite of addiction is connection but how are you supposed to connect with people when you're not legally allowed to do that
CD0394, female

Pandemic as pandemonium

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Loss of routine

Loss of income as begging and shoplifting became impossible, and employment reduced

Desire for structure and activities in emergency housing and addiction recovery accommodation

People's anonymity has gone because shoplifters have to queue up to shoplift now, which has made violent and nasty crime (...) It's not the actual addiction it's affecting at the moment (...) it's the ways they actually collate the money to get the drugs. *CG1178, male*

Pandemic as pandemonium

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Loss of inconspicuousness

Concerns over privacy at doorstep NSP

Buying drugs affected by lockdown

bristol.ac.uk

When I did walk past [Bristol Drugs Project] a few weeks ago and there was a queue outside (...) it's not usually a queue people would want to be seen stood in. I don't think people like that very much. *CE0384, female*

Drug use

Some reduced or ceased drug use due to difficulties earning money and accessing drugs

As soon as the virus come about my drug use plummeted to the point that I stopped using for a little bit completely, for a couple of weeks(...) It was hard to go out shoplifting; it was hard for me to go out and make money and I decided to stop. In some senses the virus has helped me, it sort of like cut my drug use right down. *CR0979, male*

Others reported escalations in drug use related to boredom and stress

During the coronavirus it's been worse than ever for using because everything's shut down. I suppose the boredom thing more than anything *BP0978, male*

Drug use

Use of different drugs such as Spice

Several reported injecting larger amounts of heroin

Following lockdown advice for some meant injecting alone

Difficulties accessing equipment

Because going into town has been a pain in the arse so we've been (...) using second hand, third hand, fourth hand until [Bristol Drug Project] started delivering you know.

JW0382, male

Conclusions

- Changes to prescribing broadly well received
- Loss of connection, routine and inconspicuousness negatively affected access to support and to income
- Issues with boredom and isolation exacerbating existing mental health issues and affecting drug use

Implications

- Harm reduction advice to those who have switched to using drugs on their own, or changed drug type
- Create opportunities for supporting sterile injection and effective harm reduction
- Ensure outreach of mental health care during this time

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Full interim reports and reflective blog available at:
<https://tinyurl.com/LUCIDB>

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