

Post-session Summary of Findings

Session Overview

An interactive virtual session for University of British Columbia (UBC) Master of Journalism Studies students was held via Zoom on November 17, 2020 on the topic of a recently developed report “Media & Language: De-stigmatizing language around substance use and harm reduction reporting”. Kathryn Gretsinger Associate Professor UBC School of Journalism welcomed attendees; the session was facilitated by Principle Investigator, Dr. Jane Buxton. Professionals for Ethical Engagement of Peers (PEEP) provided perspectives of lived and living experiences of substance use and the effect upon them of the way media portrays people who use drugs.

A presentation of definitions of stigma and related harms was followed by a video which shared experiences of stigma.¹ Mashal Butt, Master of Journalism Student and research assistant on this project, presented findings from the rapid evidence literature review. Journalist and author Travis Lupick, co-investigator on the project, provided insights from his experience writing about substance use and harm reduction. Students were divided into breakout rooms for a question and answer opportunity with PEEP. The 1.25-hour session concluded with another short video highlighting the impact of empathy related to substance use.¹ The session was recorded so that journalism students unable to attend in person could watch the session in their own time.

Post-session Survey²

A brief post-session survey was conducted via Google Forms platform to help inform the development of future sessions. Journalism students who completed the online survey were provided a Starbucks e-card as compensation for their time and feedback. The survey was open after the live session on November 17 until end of day December 2, 2020.

Survey Findings

Demographic Information

A total of 8 students completed the survey: 3 were in first year of the Master of Journalism Studies program and 5 in second year. Of the respondents, 6 students were under 25 years old and 2 were between 26 and 35 years old. Half of the students identified as men and half as women.

Satisfaction with the Session

Overall, 3 of the respondents reported they were extremely satisfied with the session, 4 reported they were very satisfied, and 1 reported they were moderately satisfied. Half of the respondents reported the session was extremely useful and half reported the session was very useful. When asked the open-ended question, “What did you like most about the session?”, half of the 8 comments were related to the value of hearing from people with lived and living experience.

For example, one respondent shared,

“The ability to talk to PEEPs and people with lived/living experiences was very useful and enlightening for journalism students who are looking to create alternative journalism.”

¹ Stop Sigma Save Lives <https://www.northernhealth.ca/health-topics/stigma>

² Post-session Survey developed by Abigail Steinberg (PGY-3 UBC Public Health & Preventive Medicine Resident) & Dr. Jane Buxton.

UBC Journalism student session re: Media & Language: *De-stigmatizing language around substance use and harm reduction reporting*

Other comments highlighted that respondents liked the discussion around how drugs are portrayed in the media and the focus on respectful language. When asked the open-ended question, “What could have been improved about the session?” 3 of the 7 comments reflected wanting more time, information, and discussion on this important topic.

One student suggested, “*Having some reporters/editors be part of the session to gain their views on harm-reduction reporting*”.

Views of De-Stigmatizing Language around Substance Use and Harm Reduction

When asked, “Did today’s session change your views of de-stigmatizing language around substance use and harm reduction?”, half of respondents reported “yes”, 2 reported “somewhat”, 1 reported “no”, and 1 reported “not sure”. In a follow up open-ended question prompting explanation of how views have changed, two comments reflected already having a base knowledge in this area that the session built upon.

One respondent wrote,

“It’s helped me realize that people have to let go of stereotypes around these topics, and try to normalize them. I didn’t know that there were different types of stigma, so that was helpful and I learned something new about it.”

Another student felt the quote from a PEEP member, “**People before problem. Proper reporting can change lives for the better**” was very important.

On a scale of 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely), students reported how likely they are to use de-stigmatizing language around substance use and harm reduction in their future work; 3 reported ‘6’ and 5 reported ‘7’ (very likely).

Future Session

All 8 survey respondents reported that a session about stigma and language should be available to journalism students in the future; 6 students suggested it should be integrated into a course and 2 suggested it should be optional. Of the respondents, 6 thought a future session should be offered in first year of the Master of Journalism Studies program, 1 thought second year, and 1 thought either year.

Additional Feedback

Four participants provided additional feedback.

Two of the comments requested

“more sessions like this” and “a series [to] get deeper into these topics”.

Another comment noted the session

“should be introduced in all J-Schools and made mandatory”.

Referring to the question and answer portion of the session with PEEP, one comment noted *“more time in the breakout rooms would be very cool! I loooooove that there was space for folks with lived/living exp. because they are often shafted to make way for academics/scholars who may not have the same experience.”*

We acknowledge that students who attended the session and those who completed the survey may not be representative of the UBC year 1 and year 2 students in the Master of Journalism Studies program.

UBC Journalism student session re: Media & Language: *De-stigmatizing language around substance use and harm reduction reporting*

Feedback from PEEP about the session

The positives

- Overall the event was beneficial and done well... and PEEP appreciated the opportunity to participate. The students were perceptive, asked really good questions, were open minded and wanted to learn
- The event gave PEEP an opportunity to deliver their message... to put people first in the work, we are people before the problems. That we need to report properly in the media or else we are perpetuating stigma, which is hurting so many people.
- PEEP really liked the message brought by Travis about how you need to be part of the community before you can do proper journalism on it. You need to spend time and get to know the community members in order to do the work meaningfully.
- PEEP saw value in doing this event again if there are others who want to learn. So we can create space for our perception and stories of our lives... and normalize proper ways to talk to and about PWLLE. Also to create positive narratives by repeating positive messages about our lives, our successes... not always our losses.

Suggestions for future such events

- PWLLE should be part of the planning for events like this... not just brought in later. Some of the awkwardness that happened in breakout groups could have been avoided if PWLLE were included in the planning of the meeting.
- Breakout groups work well in general so we should continue to do them, but:
 - There should have been more guidance in the breakout room to avoid awkward silence and to be more constructive. There should be moderators or mediators assigned for each group.
 - It would have been good if there were specific questions to discuss set beforehand. Having questions in advance, to be able to review and have the choice to not share personal story. We could reframe questions to suit our comfort zone.
 - We should also watch that one PWLLE doesn't get left alone in a breakout group... just for safety.
- There should be some prep work done for the attendees how to be in a room with PWLLE, in particular so people know that it isn't appropriate to pry into the personal lives of PWLLE. Accept what PWLLE have to say, but don't pry into the personal.
- We should have questions for the audience or students about their preconceptions, and then have a conversation about that... discuss their answers.

Further insights from PEEP

- It is appalling that there is no formal policy set standards for reporting on PWUD.
- People being talked about in the media should be the people being interviewed... not people outside the community talking about us.
- PEEP emphasized the need to humanize people being reported on... not just treat them as subject matter. Get to the human side of the people going through the experience.
- There should be more focus on the amazing things that PWLLE do... (artists, truck drivers)
- Emphasize that PWLLE are people and we have feelings... and we hurt when we are portrayed badly and have bad things said about us. Build us up, not shut us down.