

Media & Language

De-stigmatizing language around substance use
and harm reduction reporting

Seminar with UBC Journalism Students
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We respectfully acknowledge that we live and work on the unceded territory of the x^wməθkwəy'əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.



Conflicts of Interest

- None to declare
- This work was supported by



Outline for today

- Reflect upon how the media portrays people who use drugs
- Definitions of stigma and related terms; Person first language
- Video - The impact of stigma on people who use drugs
- Findings from a rapid evidence literature review
- Insights from a journalist when writing about substance use
- Small group Q&A with PEEP and students
- Key messages from Professionals for Ethical Engagement of Peers
- Video - The impact of empathy
- Feedback Survey

How have you seen the media portray people who use drugs?

Call out or type your answers into the chat box.

Definitions - Stigma

Stigma - *Negative attitudes and beliefs about a group of people due to their circumstances in life.*

Stereotype - *Assumptions that a group of people who share some characteristics also share certain attributes.*

Definitions - Stigma

Internalized Stigma - *Negative feelings directed towards oneself based on negative views in society.*

Horizontal stigma - *Stigma from people who are marginalized to another marginalized group.*

Stigma by association - *Experienced by people working with a stigmatized group.*

Definitions - Discrimination







Discrimination – *Action as a result of stigma.*

At an individual level, negatively acting on one's prejudiced beliefs (i.e. assumptions/stereotypes about a group of people)

At a systems level, policies and practices may be in place to prevent people who use drugs from accessing services (e.g. employment, housing, health care etc.).

Respectful language

Person first language empowers individuals by focusing on their personhood, rather than use of substances.

1	Use People-first language		
	Person who uses opioids	vs.	Opioid user OR Addict 
2	Use language that reflects the medical nature of substance use disorders		
	Person experiencing problems with substance use	vs.	Abuser OR Junkie 
3	Use language that promotes recovery		
	Person experiencing barriers to accessing services	vs.	Unmotivated OR Non-compliant 

Person First Language

People who use drugs (PWUD)

People with lived and living experience (PWLLE)

- *People who have used one or more substances and who are currently in recovery.*
- *People who are currently using one or more substances.*

Stop Stigma, Save Lives: Experiences of Stigma



Rapid Evidence Literature Review

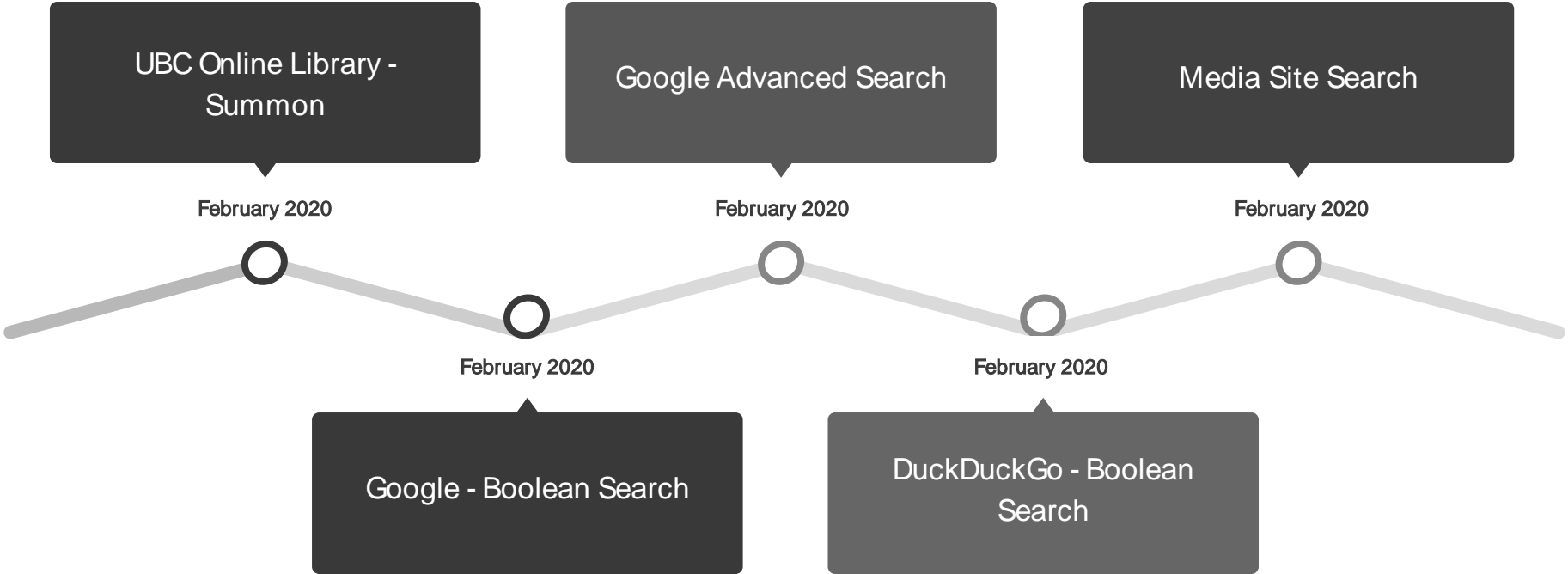
Purpose

“What are the available media guidelines addressing the use of person-first language when reporting on harm reduction and substance use?”

To review local, national and international media guidelines available and summarise their findings.

Rapid evidence literature review

Methods



Rapid Evidence Literature Review

Findings & Recommendations

There are currently no Canadian standards on substance use and harm reduction in news media reporting.

PEEP agrees that the introduction of guidelines around appropriate reporting will play a key role in reducing stigma. One peer shared:

It's really around building the capacity and ensuring that reporters have the knowledge. So, I believe [current reporting practices are] driven by ignorance and stigma. I believe that's why they report the way that they do.

Rapid Evidence Literature Review

Findings & Recommendations

- Use person-first language. This empowers individuals by focusing on their personhood, rather than their substance use.
- Be cautious when sharing substance use and harm reduction narratives. Be wary of reporting on anything that may cause unnecessary harm to people with lived and living experience of substance use.



Photo by Charlene (PEEP)

Rapid Evidence Literature Review

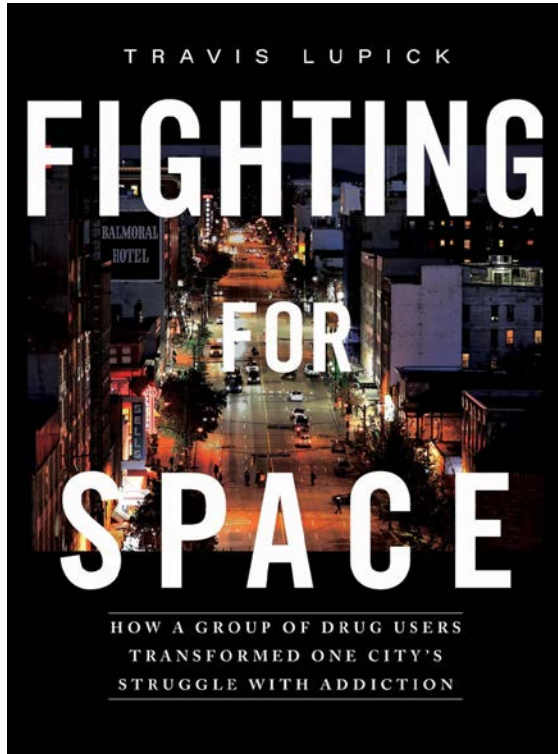
Findings & Recommendations

- Ensure narratives do not exclusively focus on substance overdose and mortality as the sole issues surrounding substance use, and also include perspectives of recovery and contextual factors that shape substance use.
- Avoid using stigmatizing imagery, exaggerated violence, criminalization, and overdose-related mortality.



Photo by Charlene (PEEP)

Key Messages from Travis Lupick



- Report positive stories as well as the challenges
- Nothing replaces spending time in the neighbourhood:
 - Helps to understand context and what is (and isn't) a story
 - Learn about issues; how to talk about them and what is important to people
 - Maintain relationships, people will call you with tips
- Treat all people the same
 - Explain who you are, what you are working on before asking questions
 - Be respectful, check spelling of names
 - Record interviews so quotes are accurate and not reported out of context
- Don't sensationalise
- The people you interview and their families will read the story

Into breakout groups

zoom
BREAKOUT ROOMS

Key Messages from PEEP



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- Person-first language is an important move away from stigmatising language. It makes an incredible difference in how people feel about themselves.

“We are people first. We are people before the problem”

- Media and journalists have the opportunity to share knowledge with communities; they can help educate the public to understand issues of substance use and harm reduction by using an evidence-informed approach.

Key Messages from PEEP



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Engagement of Peers

- Journalists taking responsibility to change the narratives will change how people are viewed by the larger community.
- The voices of people with lived and living experience, their families and friends should be in the stories not just professionals.
- Don't paint everyone who uses substances in the same way. The reasons for substance use are diverse and may be positive. Change the focus away from abstinence being the intended/preferred outcome

Stop Stigma, Save Lives: The Impact of Empathy

Stop Stigma. Save Lives.



Thank you!



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

