CHANGING ATTITUDES OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH PRISON AND INJECTING DRUG USE HISTORIES: A RESEARCH-INFORMED, CO-DESIGNED, ARTS-BASED INTERVENTION

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Introduction: Community attitudes contribute to stigma and social exclusion of people with prison and injecting drug use histories. Interventions that positively impact community attitudes are important to strengthen efforts to reduce recidivism.

Method: Data from an interview study of post-release experiences were used to produce a narrative script on the theme of exhaustion following release from prison. Members of the general public were recruited via a Qualtrics panel for a three-armed randomised controlled trial: (1) control (no exposure to the script); (2) narrative intervention (plain English description); (3) enhanced narrative intervention (script performed by a person with lived experience). Surveys were administered at baseline, post-intervention (for arms 2 and 3) and at three-month follow-up covering four key dimensions (attitudes, social distance, opinions and empathy). Qualitative interviews were conducted with 23 participants in arm 3 to further investigate attitudes to the enhanced narrative intervention.

Results: 1071 participants completed follow-up surveys (approximately n=350 per arm). At post-intervention, participants in the enhanced narrative intervention arm reported more positive scores on outcome measures than the plain English and control arms. There was no evidence of any differences between intervention arms at three-month follow-up. Qualitative data indicated that perceptions of the controllability of drug use were important to participants who reported not being influenced by the narrative intervention.

Discussions and Conclusions: Research-informed, co-designed, arts-based interventions can positively impact attitudes of the general public towards highly stigmatized groups more so than plain English research findings. However, ongoing interventions are required to maintain attitude change over time.

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