



INSITE: A SAFE HAVEN FOR WOMEN WHO INJECT DRUGS

BACKGROUND & METHOD

- Violence is common within open drug scenes. This is especially true for the women who spend time in such environments.
- There is often a sense of danger on the streets, and women who inject illegal drugs live with the constant threat of arrest, robbery, physical abuse, sexual assault, partner violence, and even murder.
- Struggling to avoid these dangers, women are less able to exercise choice in protecting themselves against other threats such as HIV and hepatitis C.
- Researchers talked with women who use Insite, Vancouver's medically supervised injecting facility.
- In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 women from November 2005 to March 2007.

FINDINGS

- What the researchers found was that, for these women, Insite provided temporary refuge from the dangers of the street-based drug scene.
- Women told the researchers that at Insite they feel safe:
 - "I don't feel rushed, I don't feel threatened or insecure by any means."
 - "You don't have to pay off somebody to watch your back."
 - "You're comfortable because you know there's people around watching, and everybody there respects each other's space."
 - "I like it 'cause it's safe there and women don't get ripped off."
- At Insite, women also learn the correct way to perform an injection. In many cases, the first time a woman uses an injection drug, someone else—usually an older male drug user—injects the drug for her.
- By learning how to inject themselves, women rely less on men and gain more control over the circumstances of their own drug use. They are then more likely to practice safer habits when injecting, such as using clean needles. This, in turn, reduces their risk of becoming infected with HIV or hepatitis C.

QUICK FACT

WOMEN WHO INJECT DRUGS WHO WERE INVOLVED IN THE STUDY SAID THAT THEY FELT SAFE AT INSITE.

IMPLICATIONS

- The purpose of supervised injection facilities is to reduce the various harms that are associated with injection drug use.
- This research demonstrates one of the ways Vancouver's Insite is meeting this goal—by providing a safe space, away from the dangers of the street-based drug scene, for women who inject drugs.

Fairbairn N, Small W, Shannon K, Wood E, Kerr T. **Seeking refuge from violence in street-based drug scenes: Women's experiences in North America's first supervised injection facility.** *Social Science & Medicine*, 2008; 67(5): 817-823.

