Knowledge – a path to dignity

Preliminary results from the project “Health School”,
basic health education for injecting illicit drug users in Oslo

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Abstract

Problem: Illicit drug users often have scarce knowledge about themes that are essential to maintain good health.

Objectives: The project aims to boost participants’ self esteem, quality of life, and self care ability, by increasing their knowledge about selected health subjects. Through increased knowledge amongst the illicit drug user population, the project is thought to inspire peer education, thus facilitating health promoting behaviour.

Methodological approach: A plan for competency and knowledge increase within the illicit drug user population in low threshold facilities was developed. This population is estimated to 3000. The project is based on the didactic relation model and socio-cultural learning theories. A qualitative, inductive approach is chosen. Data are collected through written assessments, attendance records, and a one-day workshop with health- and social workers at the Harm Reduction Section, Oslo Municipality who have run the classes. Bachelor-of-nursing students from Lovisenberg Deaconal University College have participated during their mental health practice studies.

Main findings: Recruitment has proved to be challenging, mainly because participants’ search for daily drugs is always given first priority and interest in other activities seems to be low. In order to maintain participants’ interest, each daily session should therefore be of max 20 minutes and time span of the entire course should be one week. 58 persons have participated so far. Some of them have reported an experienced increase in useful knowledge. Health- and social workers have reported remarks of pride from participants who successfully passed the health school exam.

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