

**POLICE PRACTICES IN RELATION TO
SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITE
USERS IN VANCOUVER:**

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

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OPIOID CRISIS IN CANADA

2018 = 4,460 fatal overdoses

2019 = 5,500 fatal overdoses
14 deaths per day

53% Increase in rates of hospitalization in the past 10 years

Financial burden of 3.8 billion dollars on Canadian health care system + emergency services

OPIOID CRISIS IN VANCOUVER

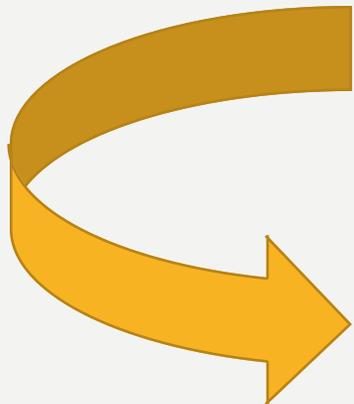
Incoming
Port for
Canadian
Drug Trade

- 8 People dying weekly due to overdose

PROVEN SOLUTION: SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES (SCS)



PREVIOUS RESEARCH

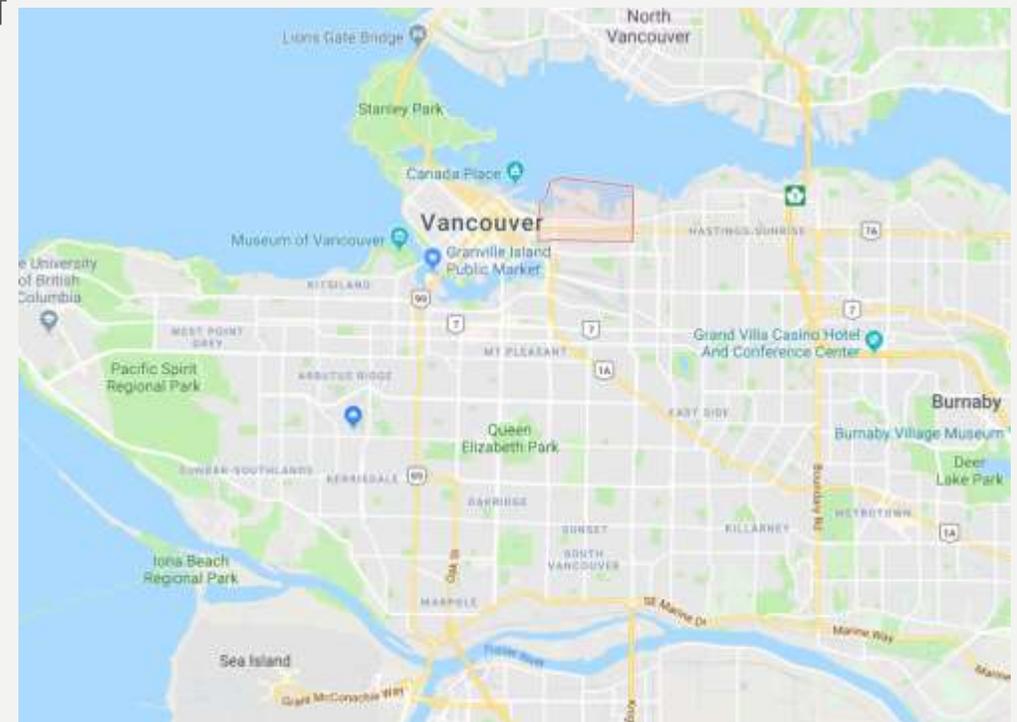


2008 Vancouver Police
Department (VPD)
Policies

Progressive Shift in VPD
Policies

METHODS : ETHNOGRAPHY

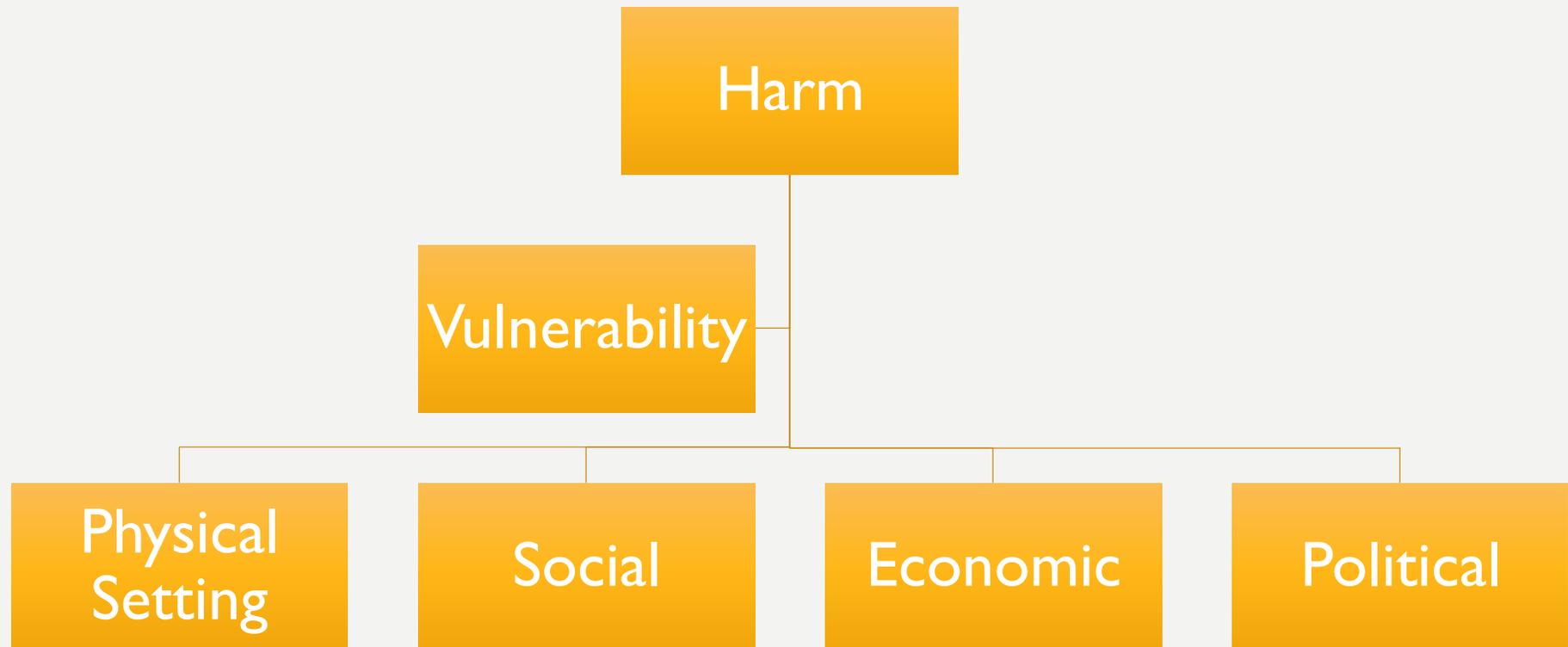
- ❖ Site: SCS in the Downtown Eastside neighborhood of Vancouver
- ❖ Semi-structured interviews: 15 SCS staff
- ❖ Focus group discussions: 30 SCS users
- ❖ Participant observation: Site as a whole



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- In everyday life how are these updated police practices being experienced by SCS users?
- How do these practices shape community perceptions of local police?
- What, if anything, is lacking in the current approach to policing drug users in the DTES?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE RISK ENVIRONMENT



THE PHYSICAL SETTING

- **Site Staff** – “Their [the police] conduct has definitely been to talk the person down first, assess the person and give that person ample opportunity to respond in a reasonable fashion. Even when there have been big brawls in the front they have been pretty hands off and genuinely understanding of the situation and the location in which they are operating”
- **Site User** – “The cops never just show up here, usually its when someone is being disruptive and they don’t stick around”
- **Site User** – “The cops let us be here, when I think of this place I don’t think about police at all”

THE SOCIAL: AVOIDING POLICE CONTACT

- **Site User** – “I’m homeless and I use from time to time but I have also been in and out of mental hospital. I can’t give the police any reason to look up my name or I’m going straight back. So I avoid them but its sometimes tough when they are always hanging about the park. That’s why sometimes I’m like yeah ill just stay in and use inside. And if I’m at the SCS and I hear pigs are about ill just hang here for a bit”
- **Site User** – “They are being told to not come to the sites but still man a few blocks away they will be there just asking people questions and stuff. I don’t need any funny business with them, I’m just trying to go about my day. So if I see them out I’m just gonna stay in”

PERCEIVED THREAT OF UNWANTED POLICE CONTACT

- **Site User** - “So we've had a fair amount of shitty experiences with those fuckers for sure, right? They're not here to serve and protect. Yeah, they are, but **for society from people like us.** That's why I stay away from them man”

LASTING IMPACT OF NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS

- **Site User** – “Yeah, I used to live over Sigma Square. It's near the Granville island area (a trendy, touristy, up and coming neighbourhood, also the location for 50 SRO's). One night I went to go pick up some milk, it was night time and it was pissing it down with rain, I was walking home, a cop fucking threw me to the ground. Held me there, its pissing it down with fucking slushy rain right, getting in my eyes, my clothes were soaked, held me there for fucking like an hour. Told me, hey, you're kind doesn't belong here. I was wearing my fucking painting outfit at the time, the first job I had held down properly since getting of probation. My kind doesn't belong here? What is that supposed to mean? I said to them I just live up the fucking street here. I started using again shortly after that but either way there is no way I am going around them at night now, fuck that, I'd rather just chill inside”

AVOIDING POLICE ASSISTANCE

- **Site User** – (Period of laughter) “I would never call the police, they aren’t here to help people like me. Even if I was in trouble”
- **Site User** – “There have been times I try and call the police when my stuff gets stolen or whatever but as soon as they know I am homeless they don’t care, so now I just shrug it off. I’d rather deal with that shit myself, who cares if I get hurt, I have a better chance that way”

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS: BRETT AND HIS BIKE



POLICY APPLICATIONS

