



CARU CYMRU

Drug-related litter event

Visit by Dr Stephen Parkin, King's College London

2019



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Attachments

Attachment 1: Space and Polity journal article (2015)

Attachment 2: Health & Place journal article (2011)

Attachment 3: Dr Stephen Parkin presentation

Attachment 4: Scott Coughlan presentation

Caru Cymru has received funding through the Welsh Government Rural Communities - Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government.



Introduction

This event was hosted by Newport City Council was held at the city's Civic Centre on Tuesday 30 July 2019. It was organised by Keep Wales Tidy as part of the new Caru Cymru project funded by the Welsh Government. Caru Cymru is a new partnership project with communities and local authorities throughout Wales, focusing on the prevention of local environmental quality issues and promoting sustainable behaviour change. The agenda is for the event can be viewed in [Annex 1](#).

Jemma Bere, Policy and Research Manager at Keep Wales Tidy welcomed everybody to the event, which was attended primarily by local authorities, health boards and substance misuse support projects and services (a list of attendees is at [Annex 2](#)). Sharps are commonly found across Wales by the charity's community officers and the potentially hazardous nature of discarded needles in particular means that the issue is a priority. Jemma has spoken with staff at other organisation such as Sustrans and Ramblers Cymru, who have shared their concerns of the prevalence of these items on volunteer managed paths and walkways in certain areas. The new Caru Cymru project allows us to look into the issues which impact the quality of the local environment in a holistic way. By bringing many partners together, we want to build a full picture of the issues around drug-related litter and tackle the problem by focusing on both harm reduction to users and influencing responsible disposal.

Dr Stephen Parkin's research findings

Dr Stephen Parkin has worked as a sociologist and qualitative researcher in the fields of primary health care, public health and substance use since 1995. Since obtaining his doctorate in 2009, he has held post doctorate research positions at the University of Manchester (Department of Primary Care) and the University of Oxford (Department for Primary Care Health Sciences). He joined King's College London in 2019.

Dr Parkin has been undertaking research work on street-based injecting drug use over more than 400 sites in various locations across England since 2006. Framed by the principles of harm reduction, public health intervention and safer injecting practice, the aims of his research have been to identify:

- The effects of injecting in public spaces on health
- Any positive or negative health outcomes associated with injecting in street-based settings
- Opportunities for service development and intervention

Understanding street-based injecting

Dr Parkin's research is of an ethnographic nature, which means that he's been able to get into the world of those being researched (in this case, street-based needle and syringe users). He explained the reasons for drug-related litter from the perspective of the user (including the need to avoid detection and interruption and the urgency attached to injecting in street settings) as well as the reasons for using such areas (relating to housing, drugs and the proximity of availability).

Injecting sites in the public realm can be found everywhere, although they tend to be hidden from view due to the user's need for secrecy and concealment. Common sites include public toilets, doorways, stairwells and bushes although areas differ significantly from a harm reduction point of view, which is the principle factor in the categorisation below.

Table 1: Categorisation of public injecting sites

Category	Examples	Condition	Behaviour
A - Controlled settings	- Toilets	- More hygienic - Has running water and lighting - Temporary privacy - Fixed sites	- Regularly used by individuals and pairs - Privacy (locked doors) and disposal facilities - Easier to 'blend-in' with the public - Equipment can be disposed of quickly
B - Semi- controlled settings	- Car parks, stairwells, parks	- Less hygienic - No running water - Poor lighting - Police presence - More exposed	- Hidden/concealed and often near static drug sellers - Associated with sex work and shoplifting - Areas known to Police/CCTV and often associated with violence, drug debts, overdose (larger sites associated with sleeping/drinking) - Social injecting (sharing)
C - Uncontrolled settings	- Phone boxes, behind skips, rough sleeper sites, 'secret places'	- Unhygienic - No facilities - Concealed - Random, isolated and transient locations	- Used by lone individuals who are typically homeless or involved in sex work - Secret place, known only to self, typically located near to a place of interest (e.g. hostel) - Concealed settings

Category B and C sites are more dangerous as they are associated with more harm (e.g. unsanitary conditions, poor injecting technique due to inadequate lighting or the potential for violent confrontation with others seeking drugs or money).

The research has led Dr Parkin to conclude that discarded syringes is the result of motivations which differ more common litter behaviours. Although purposeful disposal of needles does occur, most users despise this behaviour as it reveals the location of drug-taking. Instead, Dr Parkin believes that in many cases 'leaving'

sharps and other items associated with drug-taking can be a rationalised and explained behaviour. For example, this could be:

- Discarding (in bins or street furniture) - to avoid arrest
- Depositing (in secret or safe places) - to store for later use
- (Snapping and) dropping (anywhere) - to make safe

The user's capability to think about what they do with the sharp after injecting depends on the substance and the user's tolerance.

Managing drug-related litter

Defra published [Guidance and Good Practice](#) on tackling drug-related litter in 2005. It includes 14 recommendations which are categorised into the themes of; monitoring and surveillance, implementing a co-ordinated response and best practice (collection procedures and spatial management). In Dr Parkin's experience, local authority staff are not aware of the document. While the guidance recommends sharps bins, the experience of cleansing staff is that the related equipment is 'inconvenient', and that storage is un-coordinated across various agencies. Training is also recommended, but Dr Parkin has found that unawareness among staff is a problem.

Methods used to manage drug-related litter include needle and syringe hotlines, counting needles and mapping hotspots, littering Fixed Penalty Notices and prevention leaflets aimed at users (['If you bang it, bin it'](#) / ['Duck, dive & survive'](#)). Dr Parkin has seen many examples of bins for used syringes although their effectiveness varies. The best disposal method has been solid steel bins, safely secured and clearly labelled. Although not without its complexities, from both an environmental and harm reduction perspective, the ideal intervention is a prevalence of more 'Category A' sites with safe and disposal and a multi-agency approach to support users and associated services.

The guidance not only recommends that partnerships explore the potential for sharps bins, but that they liaise closely with drug users and services to ensure the siting and promotion of bins are as effective as possible. When this is done, there is a greater awareness of the bins among users and they are used frequently. Care is needed with Policing and enforcement activities, as this can lead users to move to more dangerous areas (e.g. Category C sites) and for needles to be more 'dispersed' in the public realm.

Dr Parkin has published widely on issues relating to injecting drug use, including over 20 peer reviewed journal papers (see examples at **Attachments 1 and 2**). He is also the author of the following two textbooks:

- Parkin, S. (2014) *An Applied Visual Sociology: Picturing Harm Reduction*. Farnham, Routledge Publications Ltd.
- Parkin, S. (2013) *Habitus and Drug Using Environments: Health, Place and Lived Experience*. Farnham, Routledge Publications Ltd.

Dr Parkin's presentation is available at **Attachment 3** and can be seen in video form [here](#). If you have any questions, you can get in touch with him by e-mailing stephen.parkin@kcl.ac.uk

Challenges and opportunities in Newport

Scott Coughlan from Newport City Council summarised the work undertaken by the local authority to tackle drug-related litter across the local authority, which began as a response to sharps injuries suffered by two members of his cleansing team.

- Gloves are not used, but the local authority has a litter pick only policy to cleanse needles, which means that the body stays as far as possible away from the discarded needles.
- Newport's street cleansing team started recording needles last year. Between May 2018 and May 2019, a total of 1,510 needles have been recorded, mostly over 6 (Category B) sites (most frequently car parks). However, 232 needles were recorded in one homeless tent located in the city centre.
- Any instances are recorded on a 'cloud'-based spreadsheet, which is populated by all the local authority's operational staff (including cleansing, parks, drainage, waste/recycling, highways, car parks, fly-tipping, grounds maintenance as well as [Kaleidoscope](#) and Substance Misuse Services).
- As well as identifying the locations of the litter, a steering group shares knowledge, works with needle services, communicates with users and installs sharps bins (in liaison with users).
- The data helps inform site specific risk assessments, identifies potential bin locations and informs outreach work. Bins can be moved if needed, in response to the nomadic lifestyle of users, and include a symbol/icon identifiable to users (rather than the general public).
- The team is working with a variety of partners, including Kaleidoscope, the Police, Substance Misuse Services and the Ward Councillors.

Tackling drugs-related litter forms a big part of the council's Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being (Welsh Government) grant bid which is being led as a national project by Keep Wales Tidy from 2019 -2021.

Scott Coughlan's presentation is available at **Attachment 4**. If you have any questions, you can get in touch with him by e-mailing Scott.Coughlan@newport.gov.uk

Discussion

Following the presentations, there was an opportunity to ask questions and discuss what had been heard. The points raised are summarised below.

- While local authorities have a duty of care for users, austerity measures have led to a cutting back of public toilet facilities (fewer opening hours or closures). This is leading to an increase in Category B and C sites and may contribute to the increase of current concern on the issue.
- Action should be targeted and it's important that users are engaged. [Dundee](#) had a significant problem with drug-related litter. The local authority claims that within a year, the number of needles collected has been halved by working in partnership.
- In rural areas or social housing situations, other methods may be used such as bins in user houses although this needs to be managed carefully.

- Dr Parkin is an advocate of safe houses/drug consumption rooms, which he considers to be best practice and is common in many European countries and Canada. For this to be possible in Wales, a legislative change would be needed.
- The Welsh Government has drafted a [Substance Misuse Delivery Plan](#) which was out for consultation this summer. This includes the addition of discarded syringes in the public realm (for the first time).
- Keep Wales Tidy has been in discussions with the Welsh Government on drug-related litter data that could be recorded by their staff and how this could be used by the Welsh Government.
- Examples of incentives do exist to encourage responsible behaviour e.g. food vouchers. Dr Parkin questioned whether this could encourage drug use and asked how the effectiveness of such an intervention is measured.
- It can be difficult to strike a balance with engaging the Police and Enforcement teams. In all areas covered by Dr Parkin's research, there was liaison with the Chief Constable. Policing on this issue can take a formal or informal approach but is largely dependent on the individual officer's point of view. Involving drug services is important and the Police are usually involved in these via Community Safety Partnerships. Overdose data could impact on the approach taken by Police in the future.
- Drug taking and discarded needles is feared among the public, and while public toilets provide the safest areas for users, care is needed not to make this too obvious as this could cause public alarm. The national needle exchange symbol is used to discreetly signpost confidential needle exchange services nationwide.
- Looking at international practice, as well as the safe houses mentioned above, North America and [Australia](#) have safer injection solutions. It was noted that street-based injecting is blatant in Vancouver. However, unlike the UK, Canada has no support services (health or drugs related) which underlined the need for continued support for user services in Wales.
- Some local authorities are beginning to map the location of drug-related litter, but care is needed as the information can be misused e.g. for political reasons. As with any other litter, it's difficult to establish where it's come from or how long it's been there. It's important to establish a reason for collecting the information and how it will be used to ensure that the problem isn't amplified or dispersed to a wider area.
- Used syringes pose a far greater danger than unused ones, so different messages are required.
- Although needle stick injuries are potentially very serious, the likelihood of contracting viruses such as Hepatitis and HIV are very low as they cannot live outside the body for long (and this time is reduced further when in sunlight).
- It's reassuring that in many cases, users are trying to do what they see as being the right thing when it comes to dealing with sharps (whatever their motivation might be). However, it can be difficult for them to take responsible action if bins aren't located in the right place or the opening hours of needle exchanges are limited. As with many environmental issues, the overarching aim must be to create enabling environments for people to do the right thing and to reduce harm.

Next steps

Actions planned following the event are summarised below.

- Keep Wales Tidy to write up notes on the event and distribute to relevant partners.
- As part of the Caru Cymru project, Keep Wales Tidy will work with Newport to support their efforts to tackle drug-related litter, in liaison with Dr Parkin. If successful, this model could be replicated in other

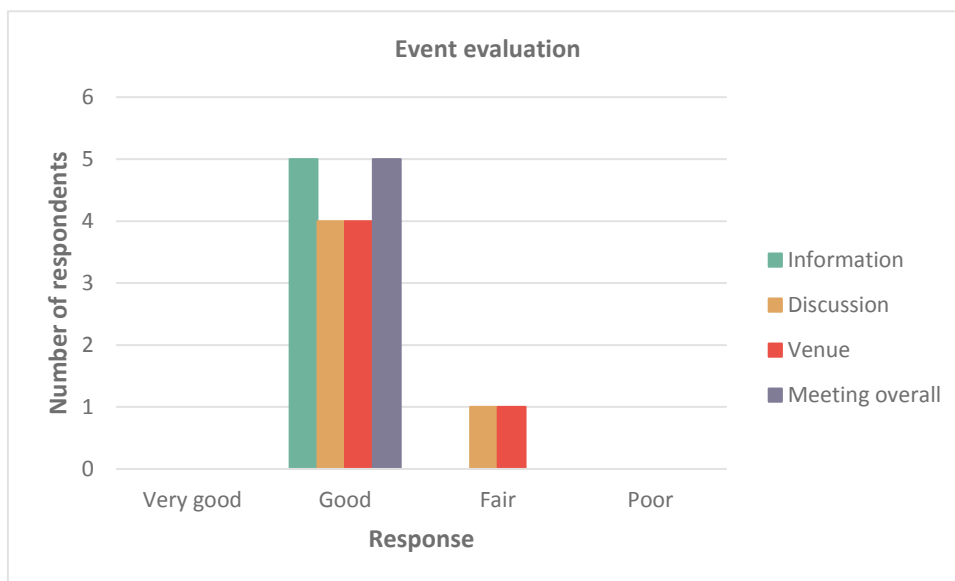
areas and best practice will be disseminated to Welsh Government, Local Government and relevant partners.

- Keep Wales Tidy will also be following up with the Welsh Government’s Substance Misuse Team.

Evaluation

All attendees were invited to provide feedback on the event. The results are summarised below.

Figure 1: Target evaluation results



Five attendees completed the first part of the evaluation. All said the information received and the meeting overall was good. Four said the discussion and venue was good, with one stating each of these was fair.

The second part of the evaluation gave respondents the opportunity to provide more detailed feedback. Comments made were as follows.

Table 2: Event feedback

What have you enjoyed?	What could have been better?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enjoyed the presentation - Good presentation/interesting discussion - Very good, thanks - presentation - Interesting discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Room temp - way too cold! - Welsh Government perspective - Longer discussion time

Overall the feedback is positive. The Welsh Government (Substance Misuse Team) were planning to attend but were unable to make it on the day. Due to events outside of the organisers control, the event was slightly delayed in starting and the presentations on the day were longer than expected and this meant there was less time than planned for discussion.

Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda

Amser / Time	Eitem	Item
13.00	Cyrraedd a chyflwyniadau	Arrival and introductions
13.30	Egluro sbwriel sy'n ymwneud â chyffuriau ac enghreifftiau o'i reolaeth: casgliadau o ymchwil ethnograffig aml-safle yn Lloegr - Dr Stephen Parkin (King's College London)	Explaining drug-related litter and illustrations of its management: findings from multisite ethnographic research in England - Dr Stephen Parkin (King's College London)
14.30	Heriau a chyfleoedd presennol - Scott Coughlan (Cyngor Dinas Casnewydd)	Current challenges and opportunities - Scott Coughlan (Newport City Council)
14.45	Trafodaeth ar y camau nesaf	Discussion on next steps
16.00	Gorffen	Close

Annex 2: Attendees

Name	Organisation
Ben Davies	Cardiff and Vale
Eleri Probert	Cardiff and Vale
Abigail Freeman	Cardiff and Vale
David McNeil	Kaleidoscope Project
Jemma Bere	Keep Wales Tidy
Hanna Jones	Keep Wales Tidy
Dr Stephen Parkin	University of King's College London
Paul Jones	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Jemma Price	Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Claire Jones	Neath Port Talbot Council
Lisa Meredith	Newport City Council
Scott Coughlan	Newport City Council
Maria Evans	Newport City Council
Geraint Davies	Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council
Leanne Bruford	Taith
Heidi Anderson	Torfaen County Borough Council
Chris Walton	Wales and West Housing Association



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