

# **Community policy & intervention to prevent violence against women in the Stockholm drug scene**

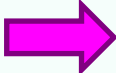
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# Overview of presentation

1. Research on women in drug cultures in Sweden and Stockholm
2. Outline of peer-involved study on violence in the main street-based inner-city drug scene in Stockholm
3. Peer research and intervention project *LJUSPUNKTEN (Bright Spot)*
4. Types and causes of violence against women in the Stockholm drug scene identified by peer research
5. Policy and practical approaches how to protect and strengthen drug using women in Stockholm

# Little scientific knowledge on women in drug scenes in Stockholm/Sweden

- **Official numbers suggest 27% women** of people heavily using drugs (European Monitoring Centre for Drug and Drug Addiction, 2011) => Assumption of significantly higher numbers (e.g. similar death rates (Ledberg, 2017))
- No difference in substance use severity in men/women (Storbjörk, 2011)
- Experience of male violence by 92% of women using illicit substances in Stockholm with majority presenting **PTSD\*** and homeless women being particularly affected (Scheffel Birath, Beijer, DeMarinis & af Klinteberg, 2013; Beijer, Scheffel Birath, DeMartinis, & af Klinteberg, 2015)
- Vicious cycle of violence leading to re-traumatisation with drug use as PTSD self-medication  Demanding abstinence from self-medication incompatible with women's life situations (Holmberg, Smirthwaite & Nilsson, 2005)

**\*Post-traumatic stress disorder**

# Peer-involved study on violence in main inner-city drug scene in Stockholm

- Guest researcher at Centre for the Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs (SoRAD) 1 - 8/2017 and cooperation with local drug user "Stockholms brukarföreningen" (SBF)
- ***Superordinate research question:***  
What are nature, conditions, and functions of violence within the main inner-city street-based drug scene in Stockholm?
- **Research aim of partial study:** Identification of common forms, sources, and functions of violence against female drug scene members
- ***Data collection:***  
Peer-led focus groups and interviews and peer research group meetings in Stockholm
- In-depth interviews with 18 currently or previously drug selling and/or using individuals and 9 experts in drugs field in Stockholm

# Peer research team LJUSPUNKTEN (Bright Spot)

LJUSPUNKTEN  
Säkerhet för  
kvinnor som  
använder narkotika

- Peer research and intervention group LJUSPUNKTEN set up by Anke Stallwitz and SBF with weekly meetings 3-8/2017
- "Peer": *From* (previously) drug using women *for* drug using women
- **Participatory action research** in which group members provided insider knowledge and assisted in:
  - Development of research design and intervention program
  - Recruitment of interview partners
  - Data collection, e.g. focus group discussions, interviews at methadone clinics in South Stockholm, and ethnographic observation
  - Data analysis

# **Common types of drug scene-related violence identified in the peer research (Stallwitz, 2018a)**

## **Scene-internal viol. against drug scene members in general:**

- Beating, kicking, punching, injury with opportunist weapons, shooting into or breaking legs, forced dealing
- Murders in context of gang fights

## **Viol. against women:**

- Sex. assaults (e.g. rape), beatings, sex for drugs; prostitution forced by partner, assaults from clients (sex work), theft (of money or drugs) from male users; viol. most common from male drug scene members and esp. within intimate relationships

## **Scene-external violence:**

- Beatings and sexual assault (of esp. women) by police & private security guards

# **Socio-cultural context and causal conditions of violence against women in the Stockholm drug scene**

# Lack of social relations and community-mindedness in the Stockholm drug scene (Stallwitz, 2018a)

- As result of severe criminalisation and stigmatisation of drugs atomised, fragmented drug scene with weak sense of ***community-mindedness***\*
- “Hard drug” dealers’ social interaction with drug scene members often restricted to business without own drug use
- Lack of social relationships and solidarity between sellers / buyers and amongst users pushing women as weakest link of scene further down
- Structures of Stockholm drug scene more patriarchal and gender roles more traditionalised than elsewhere causing generally very low and passive hierarchical positions of women - ***“reversed gender equality”***
- Strong, self-reliant, and aggressive female users and dealers existent, however, to lesser extent than elsewhere (e.g. Vancouver or Hamburg)

\* ***Community-mindedness*** (Stallwitz, 2012, 64): Mutual care, clear rules of acceptable behaviour, and non-violent sanctions of rule transgressions (encouraging *pro-social* norms and behaviour)



# Normalised violence against drug using women in Stockholm

(Stallwitz & Nystedt, 2018)

- Violent treatment of drug using women by men virtually established normality engrained in culture around drugs
- Low and passive positions within the scene's hierarchy resulting from and further enhancing women's low self-esteem
- Majority of women in drug environment traumatised and re-traumatised through rape and other forms of often male violence
- Women frequently avoiding social support and formal treatment out of fear of rigorous social sanctions

**OR**

- “Falling through treatment net”: Many drug using (esp. co-morbid) women reporting desperately failing to find support from social institutions or police

# Drug using women's experience of social stigma, criminalisation, shame & guilt (Stallwitz, 2018a)

- Ideal of being a responsible citizen causing Swedes more guilt and shame after alcohol intake than other Europeans (Moskalewicz, Room & Thom, 2016)
  - Effect increased regarding illicit substance use as indicated by strongly negative attitudes towards drugs in Sweden (Rodner Sznitman, 2008)
  - Progressive social deviation and self-victimisation through internalised norms of ideal of „a good woman“ (Lander, 2003)
  - **Strong social stigma of illicit drug use within Swedish culture**
    - Shame and guilt of acting against social norm intensified for women who deviate even more than men from socially expected role of responsible, dutiful carers
- ➡ Promoting low self-esteem, learned helplessness, victim role, social isolation, and risk behaviours (e.g. Lander, 2003)

# Women at LJUSPUNKTEN pointing out dilemma of:

- **”Dependence beyond drug dependence”**: Accepting daily physical, emotional, sexual violence from intimate partners and other men to have place to sleep, have money, keep children
- **”Dubbla skammen” (double shame)**: Shame and fear of (immediate) future and blame from society, on the one hand, and family, partner, and self on the other

# **Community Readiness Model: Research & systematic interventions based on local resources** (Reis-Klingspiegl, 2009)

- **Pilot study to understand socio-cultural phenomenon of violence against women in Stockholm drug scene** and community's climate towards it through, e.g., participating or non-participating observation and/or interviews concerning:
  - Nature and extension of phenomenon and knowledge and attitudes towards it within community
  - Types of already existing intervention strategies and knowledge of these strategies within community
  - Local knowledge and expertise
  - Phenomenon-specific community readiness, i.e. preparedness to actively tackle phenomenon
- **On basis of pilot study results design and implementation of systematic intervention plan**

# Measures to strengthen drug using women

(see Stallwitz, 2014; Ertürk (UN), 2007)

## Treatment institutions

- **Regular (discreet) outreach work:** Making contact with women; on the spot counselling/medical care & first aid; treatment transferral; crisis intervention; conflict deescalation
- Anonymous and mobile syringe & safer sex supplies

## Police & municipalities

- **Toleration model** - (public) spaces where female drug users are tolerated and can protect each other from assault etc.

## Municipalities, treatment institutions & media

- **Public debate** on situation of drug using women in Sweden focussing on, e.g., „**shame and guilt**“; risk of strong public discourse on gender equality concealing „**reversed gender equality**“ in drug environment
- **Trainings & education** to understand drug using women's life worlds of frequent traumatisation and re-traumatisation & every day violence and self-medication through drugs



# Treatment institutions supporting drug using women's resilience and empowerment (see Dahm & Wagner, 2015; see Peine, 2015)

- Treatment institutions (e.g. Ragazza Hamburg) offering **trainings and courses** to strengthen women's:
  - Sense of self-worth
  - Self-defence
  - Social and negotiating skills
  - Solidarity & community-mindedness amongst each other
  - Understanding of her own traumatisation and/or dissociative personality and accompany women to help themselves
- Treatment offers involving **peers** with own experience of drug use & violence (see Stallwitz, 2018b)

 **Overall aim to support women to emancipate from victim to agent role and out of socio-economic marginalisation**

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