

Multiply Marginalized - Drug Consumption and Disability in Higher Education - Summary

As we are amidst a drug toxicity crisis in Canada and beyond, there is a need for more studies in the area of critical drug studies, with the intersection of critical disability studies being applied. This research project sought to attend to the marginalization experienced by disabled and drug-consuming students to identify how their access to education is impacted by the toxic drug supply and a social milieu of criminalization and pathologization. During the outset of undertaking this project, the researcher hoped to conduct first-hand research by conducting interviews with participants; however, due to the combination of needing full board ethics clearance and the time constraints of this project, the decision was made to pivot. This project then became a preliminary analysis of existing literature on the topic in order to better prepare for the future directions of this research.

Literature across various related topics, such as critical drug studies, critical disability studies, and the intersection of the two as they relate to barriers to academia, was synthesized in order to produce a preliminary literature review, which culminated in the following key takeaways.

There were three main key takeaways of the preliminary literature review completed: 1) students who identify as disabled need their voices to be heard (Bruce, 2020; Carrillo-Sierra et al, 2025; College Student Alliance, 2012; Denhart, 2008; Fuller et al, 2004; Kwon, 2024; Withers, 2024), 2) those students who identify as disabled and also consume illicit substances deserve to have a place at post-secondary education (Casseus et al, 2020; Fox & Earnshaw, 2023; Li & Moore, 2001; Pasman et al, 2025; Varatharajan et al, 2024; Winfield-Ward & Hammond, 2024), and 3) stigma will drive us further and further into this ongoing and escalating crisis (Bruce & Alyward, 2021; Castrodale, 2025; McKenzie, 2015; Petrasko, 2022). These key takeaways will be used to explore how the criminalization and pathologization of this population are affecting their education.

The implications of this research have sweeping policy implications due to strict, no-illicit drug-use policies on post-secondary campuses, which may make accessing higher education difficult for this population. There is hope that the future of this research will uncover the barriers faced by these students and help inform university and college policy moving forward.

The researcher is committed to undertaking the original project plan laid out for the EDI award as part of their Master's research, building on this preliminary literature review and expanding upon it through qualitative interviews with disabled students who use illicit substances. Carleton's MA in Sociology allows ample time in which to rigorously engage with the research ethics process, recruit adequate participants, and synthesize the findings. The researcher is

passionate about this project. The voices of the marginalized and vulnerable deserve to be heard and amplified.

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