Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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BA (University of Winnipeg, 2011)

“Causing More Harm Than Good? Characterizing harm reduction policy beliefs in British Columbia”

Department of Sociology

Friday, August 14, 2020
1:00 P.M.
Remote Defence

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Garry Gray, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Bernie Pauly, School of Nursing, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Bruce Wallace, School of Social Work, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Lincoln Shlensky, Department of English, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Despite harm reduction’s social justice roots, the broader understanding of harm reduction is often influenced by morals and values which leaves harm reduction to be conceptualized within a morality policy domain. This study adopts the Qualitative-Narrative Policy Framework (Q-NPF) (Gray & Jones, 2016), to explore the policy beliefs and values that steer current harm reduction policy documents in British Columbia. Four questions guide this study: i) What are the underlying beliefs and values steering harm reduction policy in B.C.? ii) How are these beliefs and values narrated through policy?, iii) In what way do the underlying policy beliefs align with principles of social justice for harm reduction?, and iv) How have policy beliefs shifted since the 2016 public health emergency declaration? The social justice lens for harm reduction (Pauly, 2008) serves as this study’s analytical framework and is supplemented by the Systems Health Equity Lens (Pauly, Shahram, van Roode, Strosher & MacDonald, 2018); both of which emphasize the need for harm reduction to acknowledge and address social and structural conditions that contribute to substance use harms and their inequitable distribution. As this study reveals, there is an ongoing tension between equity-related and non-equity policy beliefs and values characterized within policy documents, thus fueling a policy climate with incongruent and contradictory beliefs. Further, equity-related beliefs are positioned in the confines of equitable access, thus they are not equity-oriented in entirety. Additionally, there have been minimal shifts in policy beliefs since the post-2016 public health emergency declaration yet shifts occur in terms of the specific constructs which form equity-related and non-equity beliefs. Finally, the study outlines potential implications of these beliefs and proposes recommendations to improve harm reduction policy in terms of becoming equity-oriented. This study also outlines methodological contributions to the Q-NPF for future policy narrative and analysis studies.