

## ABSTRACT

### A NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE FRESNO, CALIFORNIA NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

This study examines the concept of harm reduction and the theories that relate to it, including harm reduction theory, social construction theory, and symbolic interaction theory. It provides a thorough review of the theoretical and empirical literature that relates to these theories, as well as to needle exchange programs and injection drug use. The findings reflect the results of nine qualitative interviews with key informants of the Fresno needle exchange program, a part of a needs assessment of the program. Based on the interviews with informants, recommendations are made for policy changes and for the training of social workers and those in the field of chemical dependency. Recommendations are also made for the development and support of a more comprehensive program to reach more of the drug using community in the Fresno area. This study seeks to inform the policies that impact the highly marginalized intravenous drug using community.

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