

The Loss of the Social: Mask-wearing During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Category: Poster Presentation (in person)

Abstract Body

What impact did mask-wearing have on vulnerable clients during the COVID-19 pandemic in a range of spaces and interactions? Drawing on over 100 interviews with a wide variety of front-line shelter and outreach staff from across Canada, this study examines the detailed ways in which wearing a mask becomes a site of contested meaning, one that tests the frailty of social care interactions. Three dimensions of masking interaction come into focus from these interviews: the negotiation of wearing a mask in a variety of settings, the ways in which the mask became of proxy for assumptions about wider issues such as risk and autonomy, and three, the face to face communication dynamics of mask wearing encounters in relation to trust and relationship building. This paper contributes to the understanding of the impact of how a mundane ‘micro’ aspect of care work is carried out – and in doing so, contributes to a more nuanced analysis of isolation, trauma, autonomy, and risk.

Key Words

- Assessment/screening
- Mutual Help/Peer Support/Lived Experience
- Policy
- Stigma
- Trauma

Learning Objective # 1

Attendees should have an understanding of the frail, contingent, and conditional nature of front-line caring relationships

Learning Objective # 2

Attendees should have an understanding of how the most mundane and minor barriers can lead to significant breaches of trust

Reference # 1

Bosch-Arís, M., Gasulla, L., de Gispert, T., Segura, L., & Colom, J. (2022). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on harm reduction services in Catalonia: the experience of people who use drugs and harm reduction professionals. *Harm Reduction Journal*, 19(1), 1–118. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-022-00699-1>

Reference # 2

Kedia, S. K., Schmidt, M., Dillon, P. J., Arshad, H., & Yu, X. (2021). Substance use treatment in Appalachian Tennessee amid COVID-19: Challenges and preparing for the future. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 124, 108270–108270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2020.108270>

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