Drug misuse can cause significant health consequences, morbidity, or even mortality. The devastating statistics on the opioid epidemic emphasizes the detrimental consequences illegal substances have on the United States. More than 130 Americans die a day from opioid overdoses (NIDA, 2019). From 2015 to 2016, New York State alone saw a 32.4% increase in drug-related overdose deaths (CDC, 2017). Safe Injection Sites (SIS) allow injection drug users (IDUs) to use drugs in a hygienic and low risk environment. Though research supports their efficacy, there is a lack of support among the public when assessed anecdotally. To our knowledge, there is no existing empirical literature on the public opinion of SIS within the United States. Thus, this study explored community perceptions of SIS in New York State, an area heavily affected by the opioid crisis.

METHODS

Participants
* The sample consisted of 121 constituents of New York from nine regions of the state: Long Island (LI), New York City (NYC), Lower Hudson (Valley (LHV)), Capital Region/Northern Catskills, Eastern Adirondacks (EA), Western Adirondacks (WA), Central New York (CNY), Western Finger Lakes (WFL), and Western New York (WNY).
* Participants were recruited using both in person and online sampling (n=116). Participants recruited online completed the survey via SurveyMonkey.

Measures
* Three measurement tools were utilized:
  1. A demographics questionnaire
  2. The Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs Survey (KAB) created by the Drug Misuse Research Division of the Health Research Board in Dublin, Ireland. The KAB was adapted for use in this study with permission of the Health Research Board.
  3. The Safe Injection Sites (SIS) Survey was developed for the purposes of this study to assess opinion and supportiveness of the use and implementation of SIS. The SIS survey was drafted and piloted on 6 undergraduate students to determine comprehension and ambiguity of terms.
* An informational paragraph was provided to ensure that all participants had basic knowledge of SIS before completing the SIS Survey.

Demographics
* Participants’ ages ranged from 19 to 70 years with an average age of 31.65 years old (SD = 11.58).
* 47.93% of participants resided in the Capital Region. The remaining were distributed between LI, LHV, EA, CNY, WFL, and WNY. No participants resided in WA.
* 68.60% were Female; 14.88% Male; 2.48% Non-Binary.
* 52.07% identified as Liberal; 33.06% as Not Liberal.
* Approximately 14% of participants failed to report demographics.

Knowledge, Attitudes, & Beliefs Survey (KAB)
* 52.10% of participants had heard of an opioid drug before.
* 52.07% identified as Liberal; 33.06% as Not Liberal.
* 90.9% of people knew someone who had a drug problem.
* The mean KAB score was 124, meaning participants overall had a positive or undecided view on drugs and drug users.

Safe injection Sites Survey (SIS)
* The total mean SIS survey score was 48, meaning that participants had between a slightly agreeable to undecided view of SIS.

Hierarchical Linear Regression
* Predictors were entered in a series of four blocks (Table 1). The model accounted for 69.5% of the variance in level of supportiveness for SIS.
* Relationship status & having children were not significant predictors of SIS supportiveness.
* Political affiliation was the highest predictor of SIS supportiveness; participants who were more liberal were more supportive of SIS. It represented 30% of the variance.
* Those with negative attitudes toward drug users and who had heard of an opioid drug were less supportive of SIS.

RESULTS

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>R Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Block 1 - Relationship Status</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td>0.08*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having Children</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 2 - Employment</td>
<td>0.49*</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Block 3 - Political Affiliation</td>
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<td>-0.44**</td>
<td>0.30**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Block 4 - Attitudes and Beliefs</td>
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<td>0.26**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of drug use</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity with opioid drugs</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Total R² = 0.695, p < .05. All coefficients are unstandardized; bold and blue indicates that the effect is significant; * = p < .05 and ** = p < .001

CONCLUSIONS

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine community perceptions of SIS amongst a U.S. population. This study provides evidence that the overall perception of SIS is largely undecided, and that specific demographics, familiarity with opioid drug use, and attitudes and beliefs about drugs are related to level of SIS supportiveness. Research has shown that those who are at greatest risk for having a heroin addiction include Non-Hispanic White people, Males, and those who are 18 to 25 years old; this study’s participants mainly account for Non-Hispanic White people (72%), and those who are 18 to 25 years old (38%) (CDC, 2017). Having participants that reflect most of the identified affected population for one category of users is useful in gaining insight into the consensus of drug perceptions and support of SIS; however, the majority of the participants identified as female do not represent the impact of drug usage among men. Since the idea of implementation for SIS is relatively new within the United States, lack of knowledge about SIS might give reason to the undecided opinion. It is not surprising that political affiliation was a significant predictor of level of SIS supportiveness seeing as SIS, and drug usage, has long been a controversial issue. The current study findings must be considered in light of limitations. Sampling method of recruitment may have restricted the diversity of participants. Additionally, there was a considerable amount of missing demographic data. Future research may want to consider shortening the survey length or conduct qualitative analyses examining reasons for or against SIS supportiveness.

References

Assembling Support for Safe Injection Sites Among Adult Constituents in New York
Kathleen Giarratano, M.A., & Marisa Beeble, Ph.D.