

## Practical session 1

### Assessing vulnerability, risk and ethical considerations

The aim of this practical session is for you to think through some of the issues involved in the planning and interviewing of participants, focussing on vulnerability, risk and other ethical considerations. You'll work in small groups to discuss a scenario and feed back to the rest of the group.

#### **Scenario 4 – Mandy**

You are conducting a qualitative study into the HIV risk behaviours for injecting drug users. The research funder expects the study to cover drug users' injecting and sexual practices. You are working closely with a needle exchange service to identify suitable participants to be involved in the study. The service has said that rooms there can be used for the interviews. A needle exchange worker suggests that Mandy, 35, would be a good person to interview. Mandy has injected heroin for the last 15 years, has been in and out of prison and was diagnosed with HIV 8 months ago. She lives with her long-term partner and their young daughter.

You arrange an interview with Mandy at the needle exchange, but she does not attend. Later that day she calls to apologise, saying that she had forgotten and asks for another interview time. Mandy arrives for the rescheduled interview 15 minutes late with her partner and young daughter. She is very apologetic as she has to leave in 45 minutes for a hospital appointment. During the interview Mandy says that she is trying to stop injecting but is reluctant to talk about her previous injecting behaviour in case it tempts her to inject again. At times in the interview Mandy reflects on her HIV diagnosis and becomes very upset. Five minutes before the end of the interview, Mandy's partner knocks on the door saying that they have to leave for the hospital. She leaves the interview in a hurry as she doesn't want her partner to 'lose his temper'.

*Think about...*

- What things are important to consider in using the needle exchange as a gatekeeper?
- How would you deal with Mandy's reluctance to talk about her injecting?
- What may be some of the risks of interviewing Mandy?
  - ...for the interviewer?
  - ...for Mandy?
- What risk management strategies do you think you might adopt?