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# Public Perceptions of Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) in Rural Pennsylvania: Opportunities, Challenges, and Barriers

**Josiah Miller, Dr. Duane Donmoyer, Dr. James Plumb\***

(\* ) indicates primary project advisor



# Introduction and Objectives



## Opioid Epidemic

- National, state, and local emergency
- Rural communities disproportionately affected
- PA has 3<sup>rd</sup> largest rural population in the country

## Project Rationale

- Prior studies: rural PA counties & rural communities in other states
- Few, if any, studies on rural communities in PA

## Inquiry Question

- “How has OUD affected a rural community in Pennsylvania from the perspective of individuals involved in local public health?”



## Methods



### Study Population

- Individuals involved in local public health
  - Local government (mayor, county coroner)
  - Law enforcement (police chief, city police, parole officer)
  - Healthcare (emergency medicine, primary care, addiction medicine)

### Data source and collection methods

- Key stakeholders within the community regarding OUD
- Key stakeholder interviews (in-person, virtual, phone)
  - 15 open-ended questions tailored to each professional's field

### Analysis

- 2 independent thematic analyses synthesized

# Results

- 4 main themes identified

Theme	Key findings
Impacts of OUD on the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Direct - deaths, overdoses, crimes, homicides, domestic issues</li><li>• Scope - all ages, SES levels, mostly 18-40, elderly, family units</li><li>• Continuing problem</li></ul>
Rural community challenges to combating OUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Low Socioeconomic status</li><li>• Limited intervention capabilities</li><li>• Difficulty removing affected individuals from toxic environment</li></ul>
Community strategies against OUD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mainstream education efforts from kindergarten onward</li><li>• Modified prescription practices</li><li>• Warm-handoff option for pts presenting at local ER</li><li>• County prison in-pt. rehab</li></ul>
Recommended additional community action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Cooperation between different social spheres</li><li>• Increased community education and empowerment to act</li><li>• Lengthened rehabilitation for individuals with OUD</li></ul>

# Conclusions

## Impact

- Community significantly affected by OUD across multiple societal levels (Individual, Interpersonal, Community)
- Measures are currently in place to combat OUD
- Additional action could be taken
  - Community education on recognizing signs of OUD
  - Community empowerment for earlier intervention (teachers, coaches, parents)
  - Advocacy for prolonged rehabilitation for individuals with OUD

## Limitations & possible improvements

- Sample size - ten individuals interviewed in one community
- Group debrief/discussion after individual interviews

## Scope and next steps

- Discuss findings with community leaders & advocate for proposed changes
- Future studies on impacts of recommended changes
- Future studies on other rural communities

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