The Experience of Overdose in Oregon: How Risk is Shaped by Personal Characteristics, External Factors, and Naloxone

Morgan Godvin
Danielle Good, Lynn Wenger, Erica Browne, Gillian Leichtling, Barrot H. Lambdin, Alex H. Kral
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Methods

- Quantitative survey of 468 people who use drugs across 8 counties in Oregon.
  - 32 qualitative surveys

- Participants were recruited in collaboration with partner agencies that provide supportive services to people who use drugs or through direct outreach.

- Eligibility criteria: any use of drugs impacted by M110

- Data collection: March – November 2023
  - At least 2 years after M110 was enacted and 6 months after the majority of funding was allocated to community providers
“When there was heroin, I’d never, ever seen anybody overdose ever, and I’d been doing heroin probably for 10 years or so. As soon as fentanyl came around, pfft! Everyone started. It’s really sad. I’ve lost probably a good 10—probably 20 people I’ve known in the last two years have died because of fentanyl.”

- Participant in Jackson County
Drug Use Demographics:

- 93% used methamphetamine in the past 30 days

- 53% of participants used fentanyl in the past 30 days

- 46% (n=215) did not use fentanyl in the past 30 days
  - Of this group, 83% had never used fentanyl

- 37% of participants use both fentanyl and meth regularly
  - 22% of participants use both fentanyl and meth every day
Drug Use Demographics:

- 38% of participants have never used fentanyl
- 40% of participants use fentanyl every day
- 2% of participants have never used meth
- Fentanyl users tended to be younger (average age of 35 vs 43)
- Fentanyl users were more likely to be homeless
- Fentanyl users were less likely to be disabled

Regular use is defined as ≥10 days per month
### Lifetime Overdose Experiences

- Those who used fentanyl regularly were three times more likely to have overdosed.
- Regular fentanyl users have on average 1.5 more overdose experiences.
- Regular fentanyl users have experienced an average of 3 non-fatal overdoses.

#### Percent of Participants Who Have Overdosed in their Lifetime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Using Fentanyl</th>
<th>Not Using Fentanyl</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overdoses</strong></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>90</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Average Number of Lifetime Overdoses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Using Fentanyl</th>
<th>Not Using Fentanyl</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overdoses</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“When there was heroin, I’d never, ever seen anybody overdose ever, and I’d been doing heroin probably for 10 years or so. As soon as fentanyl came around, pfft! Everyone started. It’s really sad. I’ve lost probably a good 10—probably 20 people I’ve known in the last two years have died because of fentanyl.”
"If someone was overdosing or something I would obviously start doing the things that I know—initiating Narcan, start breathing for them. If it came to the point to where I could not do that, obviously I would dial 911.

I’ve helped probably about a good 10 or 15 people who were overdosing, and I’ve never had a problem once with making sure that they came back to life. I seriously feel like, if I were to have stopped and went to go dial 911—took all that time—they probably would’ve died on me."

- Participant in Jackson County
78% of all participants report witnessing an overdose.

People who use fentanyl regularly were much more likely to administer naloxone (60% of witnessed overdoses vs 8.3%).

The person was reported to have survived in 97% of witnessed overdoses.

**Overdoses Witnessed**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Overdoses Witnessed in Past 12 Months</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use Fentanyl</td>
<td>![Graph showing a higher number of overdoses witnessed by users of fentanyl]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Using Fentanyl</td>
<td>![Graph showing a lower number of overdoses witnessed by non-users of fentanyl]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>![Graph showing the total number of overdoses]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Image of Oregon’s Measure 110 logo]
Calling 911 During an Overdose

- People who use drugs fear arrest when calling 911, some report feeling at risk of arrest if they overdose (Rouhani S, 2021)
- People who use fentanyl regularly were less likely to call 911 during a witnessed overdose (50.5% of vs 61%)

“We know how to deal with overdoses. Narcan.”
- Participant in Umatilla County

“Most people who are using have a warrant for their arrest from parole and probation. The last thing anybody’s going to do is call the cops if they don’t have to…” (Oregonian who uses drugs as quoted in Shin, 2022)
Overdose:

“I personally haven’t seen anybody die of an overdose yet. I’ve had to help 11 people overdosing, and they’ve all come back because of Narcan.”

- Participant in Multnomah County
Naloxone

71% of participants had at least one dose of naloxone.

Those who had accessed a syringe exchange in the past year (48% of total) were 30% more likely to have been given naloxone and more likely to still have a dose.

Those who had overdosed in the past year were more likely to have been given naloxone (93% vs 74%).
Overdose Risk Factors

- Those who injected fentanyl were not more likely to overdose than those who only smoked/used by routes other than injection.

- Those who were incarcerated in the past 12 months were twice as likely to have overdosed (33% vs 18%, RR 1.85 95% CI 1.33, 2.57; p<0.001)
  - More episodes of incarceration may be correlated with a higher risk of overdose.

- 68% of regular fentanyl users have used alone in the past 30 days.

- Whether a participant knew that any drugs had been decriminalized did not influence their overdose risk.

- Those who knew that fentanyl was decriminalized (19% of participants) were no more or less likely to overdose.
Conclusion and Recommendations

- An overwhelming number of nonfatal overdoses are being reversed with naloxone, in many cases 911 is not called
  - Any overdose hotspot detection-type intervention will be limited if solely relying on EMS data

- Fentanyl users are more likely to witness an overdose and much more likely to administer naloxone
  - This is the priority population for naloxone distribution
  - That overdose survivors are more likely to be given naloxone implies there is a mechanism by which naloxone is reaching those most at risk

- Fentanyl users are more likely to witness an overdose and much more likely to administer naloxone
  - Accessing a syringe exchange increases the likelihood of having naloxone
Conclusion and Recommendations

- Many other studies have shown the overdose risk correlation to incarceration; it has now been conclusively found in Oregon.

- Fentanyl is perceived as a major driver of the increasing rate of overdose:
  - The majority of fentanyl users are using alone at least some of the time.

- With almost everyone we surveyed using meth regularly, it needs to remain a priority for both harm reduction and treatment interventions.

- More research is needed on the effects of co-use of fentanyl and methamphetamine.

- More research is needed on smoking as the route of intervention for fentanyl:
  - The expected decline in overdose risk was not shown by this survey.
Morgan Godvin
morgangodvin@gmail.com
morgangodvin.com

@morgangodvin