

Researchers provide insights for reducing drug overdoses through community education

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Results from a new study show that participants in drug overdose education programs tend to be parents (mostly mothers) who provide financial support for their son/daughter, have daily contact with their loved one, have applied for court-mandated treatment and have witnessed an overdose.

These findings, which appear in *Substance Abuse*, come amid an opioid addiction epidemic and could offer a roadmap for how best to equip communities to prevent deaths from drug overdoses.

Opioid use is a growing problem in the United States. Currently, more than 20 million Americans are illicit opioid users, misusing prescription opioids or using street opioids such as heroin. As a result, drug overdose has surpassed [motor vehicle crashes](#) as the leading cause of death due to injury in the U.S. In the case of opioids, these deaths often are preventable with the use of naloxone, a medication that quickly reverses the potentially fatal effects of opioids. The success of naloxone has spurred a movement of community programs to help train opioid users and their loved ones on how to correctly identify a drug overdose and administer this life-saving medication. However, little is known about how to most effectively implement and target these programs.

In order to assess the characteristics of participants in [support groups](#) for family members of opioid users, researchers from Boston University

School of Medicine (BUSM) and Boston Medical Center (BMC) surveyed a cross section of attendees and found that the common demographic for these meetings was mothers of [opioid users](#), many of whom provided [financial support](#) to their child. They also found their main motivation to be acquiring naloxone for their homes. "The high degree of involvement in the lives of an opioid user among attendees is consistent with reported motivations to have a kit in the house for a greater sense of security and improved confidence to handle an overdose," explained lead author Sarah Bagley, MD, from the Clinical Addiction Research and Education (CARE) Unit at BUSM and BMC and a physician in General Internal Medicine at BMC.

According to the researchers, overdose [education programs](#) in family support group settings show promise as a strategy to expand public health overdose prevention efforts into the community and social networks impacted by opioid use. "Support groups for families of people who use opioids are promising venues to conduct overdose prevention trainings, because attendees are motivated to receive training and will use [naloxone](#) to rescue people when witnessing an overdose. However, further study is warranted to understand how to optimize this approach to [overdose](#) prevention in the community setting," she adds.

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

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