

# SOCIAL SUPPORT AND OUD

FACT SHEET - APRIL 2019



## SEVERITY

### *Size of the Problem*

The risk of opioid use disorder (OUD) is affected by a number of risk and protective factors. Research has identified several OUD risk factors, but we know very little about protective factors. In general, having a strong social support system also serves as a protective factor. Youth who have a good relationship with a teacher and/or involved parents, were less likely to have OUD. In particular, relationship factors affect an individual's risk of OUD.

For persons in treatment for OUD or cocaine use disorder, marriage and having a close personal relationship with a significant other had a reduced risk of relapse compared to those that were single or without a close personal relationship.<sup>1</sup>

This speaks to the importance of social support at the individual level, but it's also imperative to have support at the community level so individuals can receive comprehensive, quality care and be successful in the recovery process.

## COMMUNITY VIEW

The RCORP-ETC analysis working group conducted a survey and had discussion groups to better understand the strengths and challenges facing OUD prevention, treatment, and recovery.

### *Survey Results*

From across the region, 54% of survey participants identified social support as a community strength while 26% viewed it as a community challenge.

- Support for people with OUD who seek help, support groups to prevent OUD relapse, social support for people with OUD, and community support for OUD treatment were ranked 1st, 3rd, 14th and 17th, respectively, out of 19 identified strengths.

The following OUD-related challenges reflected social support and were selected by 100 or more people:

- 'Lack of support groups to prevent OUD relapse' was chosen by 116 individuals as a community challenge making it the 5th most important identified challenge
- 'Lack of social support for people with OUD' was chosen as a challenge by 10% of survey participants (ranked 11th of 24 identified challenges)

Of the respondents, 507 shared their perceptions of OUD-related stigma on an 8-item scale. The summed response scores ranged from 8-40; a higher score indicated greater perceived levels of community stigma related to OUD.

- For the 507 people who answered all 8 questions, the average stigma score was 29.3, ranging from 14-40.
- Perceived community OUD stigma did not differ by county.
- People with personal OUD experience (n=68) reported a significantly higher mean level of stigma (Mean=30.6) compared to people without OUD experience (n=427; Mean=29.0; p<.05).

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RURAL COMMUNITIES  
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EAST TENNESSEE  
CONSORTIUM



## Discussion Results

One of the discussion groups focused on support for individual and community health efforts.

In order to foster social support, discussion group members emphasized the need for collaboration between local public health systems and the medical community. However, some viewed OUD related stigma as challenging the relationship between public health and medical services.

## FEASIBILITY

There are recovery support groups available in the East TN region, with many in urban areas. An increase in recovery support services is an opportunity for increased social support.

- The Lifeline Peer Project was established to reduce stigma related to the disease of addiction and increase access to substance abuse recovery services. The Knox County location is outside the RCORP-ET region.
- The Addictions Recovery Program which offers a variety of services to individuals with issues brought on by their substance abuse. There are two locations in the RCORP-ET region in Morristown and Jellico, Tennessee.
- Rescue 180 is located in Jefferson County. This organization helps patients who have received Narcan by first responders reach out to others who have survived an overdose. There is a group that meets with patients' families and works to get the overdose patients into treatment and recovery
- Support services specific to women are also available, but again these are mostly in urban areas.

## RIPPLE EFFECT

Increasing social support is likely to positively impact five of the other nine areas of concern.

These include:

- Unemployment
- Stigma
- Physical and emotional abuse
- Overdose
- Mental health

The following efforts could enhance social support in relation to reducing the community health impact of OUD. If we increase collaboration between the public health system and medical services, it would increase community support for those in need in the professional realm.

At the community level, it's necessary to increase community knowledge of addiction through the telling of success stories. This could reduce community stigma.

At the relationship level, it was suggested that access to recovery support groups be increased in order to foster social support through relationship building.

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## References

1. Smith PH, Homish GG, Leonard KE, Cornelius JR. Intimate partner violence and specific substance use disorders: findings from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. *Psychol Addict Behav.* 2011;26(2):236-45.