

Law enforcement and criminal justice professionals’ knowledge and attitudes towards medication assisted treatment for opioid use disorder in rural communities

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CONTEXT

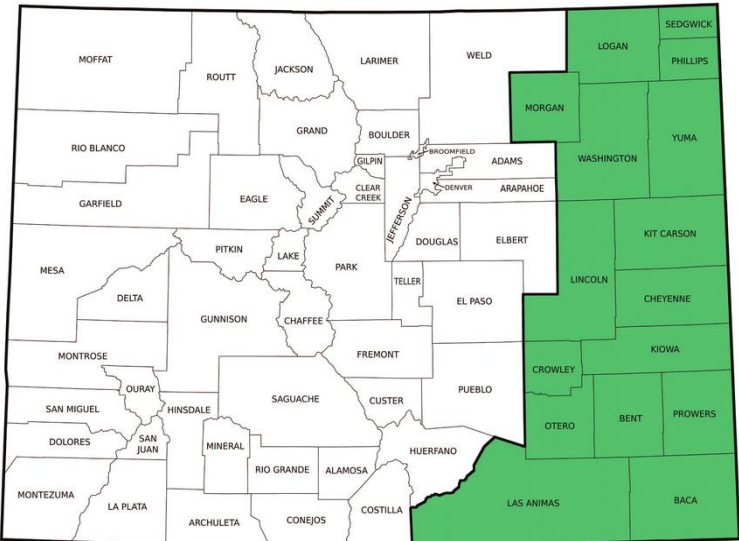
- Drug overdose death rate in individuals released from jail is up to seven times higher than in the general population.
- There is a lack of access to medication assisted treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorder (OUD) in prisons and jails, despite leading health organizations recommendations.
- There is very little known about criminal justice system professionals’ knowledge and attitudes towards OUD and MAT

OBJECTIVE

- Describe law enforcement and criminal justice system professionals’ knowledge and beliefs related to OUD and MAT in rural communities.
- Explore awareness of MAT-related policies and perceived barriers to MAT in jail and prison settings.

METHODS

- Cross-sectional quantitative survey and qualitative key informant interviews
- Surveys mailed to probation officers, sheriffs, police chiefs, police officers, county court judges, district court judges, and staff
- Key informant interviews conducted with a sample of those surveyed
- Conducted in rural and frontier counties in eastern Colorado in the High Plains Research Network
- Analyses were descriptive



High Plains Research Network Region

Limitation

Absence of data from other members of the CJ-LE community with potentially valuable insights, such as local police officers and other court personnel.

Conclusion

Knowledge and awareness of medication assisted treatment (MAT) and related policies varied greatly among law enforcement professionals. Opportunities to train law enforcement professionals about MAT and efforts to create partnerships between the legal system and medical community could improve the public health response to OUD in this underserved region..

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RESULTS: 45/63 = 71% response rate

Table 1 Respondent Demographics (N=45)

Characteristic	N =(%)
Gender	
Male	38 (84.4)
Female	6 (13.3)
Prefer Not to Answer/Missing	1 (2.2)
Race	
American Indian/Alaskan Native	3 (6.7)
Asian	0 (0)
Black or African American	0 (0)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0 (0)
White	37 (82.2)
Other	0 (0)
Prefer not to answer	5 (11.1)
Ethnicity (n=44)	
Hispanic or Latina/o	4 (8.9)
Not Hispanic or Latina/o	36 (80.0)
Prefer not to answer	4 (8.9)
Role	
Probation officer	6 (13.3)
Sheriff	13 (28.9)
Sheriff office personnel	5 (11.1)
Police force	5 (11.1)
County court judge	8 (17.8)
District court judge	8 (17.8)
Length in profession	
<1 year-2 years	6 (13.3)
3-5 years	6 (13.3)
6-10 years	7 (15.6)
11-15 years	7 (15.6)
>15 years	19 (42.2)

Figure 1 Awareness of availability of medication assisted treatment in community for people coming into contact with justice system

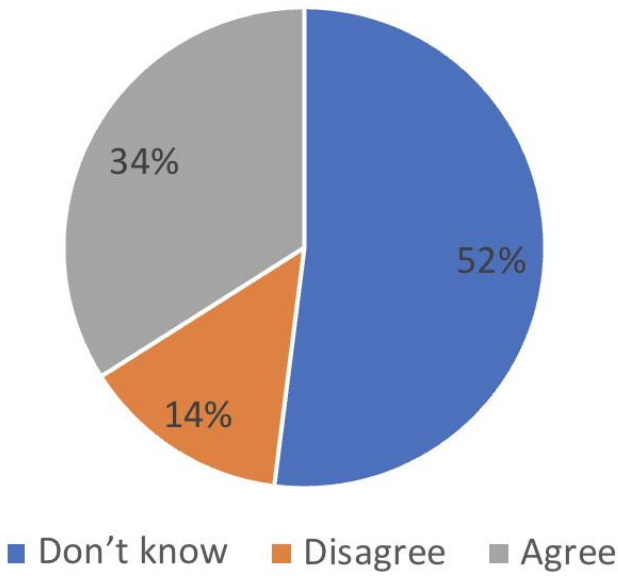


Figure 2 Perceived barriers to using buprenorphine to treat OUD in jail/prison settings

Potential Barrier	Yes n (%)	No n (%)	Don't Know n (%)
Cost/insufficient funding	14 (33%)	9 (21%)	19 (45%)
Risk of diversion	8 (19%)	8 (19%)	26 (62%)
Court policy against its use	0	22 (52%)	20 (48%)
Lack of local providers	19 (45%)	9 (21%)	14 (33%)

Figure 3 Awareness of jail/prison policy to screen for opioid use disorder

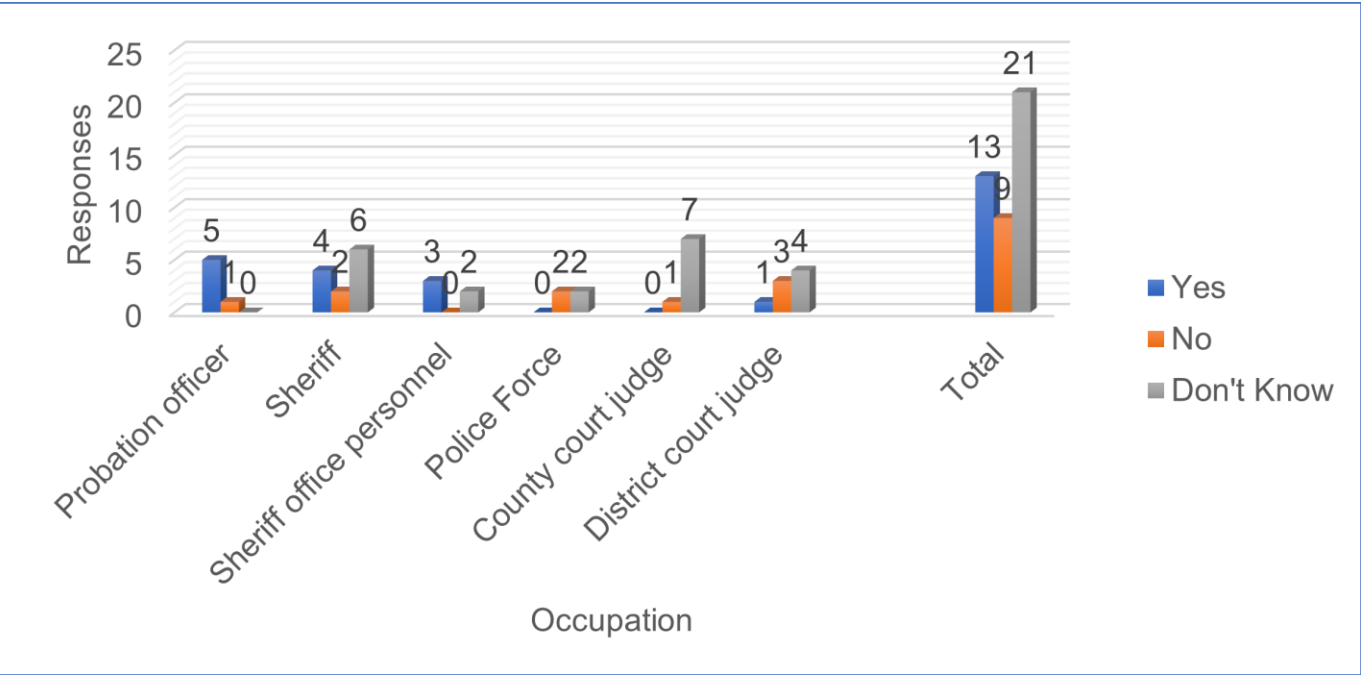


Table 2 Knowledge of opioid use disorder and medication assisted treatment

Question	N	Do not know responses n (%)	Correct responses n (%)	Incorrect responses n (%)
Opioid addictions is a chronic disease.	45	2 (4.4)	34 (75.6)	9 (20.0)
Heroin and prescription pain medications target the same area of the brain.	45	16 (35.6)	29 (64.4)	0 (0)
Many people who become addicted to prescription pain medicine transition to using heroin.	45	8 (17.8)	32 (71.1)	5 (11.1)
Medication assisted treatment is an effective method to treat opioid use disorder.	45	15 (33.3)	27 (60.0)	3 (6.7)
With repeated opioid use, euphoria diminishes and eventually continued use is needed to “just feel normal”.	45	10 (22.2)	35 (77.8)	0 (0)
Medication assisted treatment with buprenorphine reduces relapse.	43	25 (58.1)	14 (32.6)	4 (9.3)
MAT with buprenorphine helps reduce crime and re-incarceration.	44	23 (52.3)	16 (36.4)	5 (11.4)
MAT with buprenorphine reduces or blocks the effects of heroin.	44	25 (56.8)	13 (29.5)	6 (13.6)

Key Informant Interview Themes 13 total interviews

- Frequency of reported contact with people with OUD varied by region, with participants in SE counties reporting higher frequency compared to those in the NE region
- Most expressed overall positive opinions regarding MAT
- Judges interviewed would consider using a deferred judgment if a person were to complete a MAT program
- Expressed a need to address methamphetamine and other drugs, along with treatment for OUD