

Evaluating Knowledge, Attitudes and Understanding of the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act in BC

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Why evaluate the Good Samaritan Drug Overdose (GSDOA) Act?



- A public health emergency was declared in BC April 2016 due to an increase in opioid overdoses (BC Ministry of Health, 2016)
- Previous evidence suggests most overdoses occur in presence of bystanders (Martins et al 2015; Karamouzian et al., 2019)
- By-standers delay or do not call 911 at overdose events due to fear of police involvement (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 2017)
- To overcome this concern, the Federal Good Samaritan Overdose Act was implemented in May 2017 (Government of Canada, 2019)

What is the GSDOA?

THE GOOD SAMARITAN DRUG OVERDOSE ACT RECEIVED ROYAL ASSENT ON MAY 4TH, 2017

This enactment amends the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act to exempt persons seeking emergency medical or law enforcement assistance for themselves or for others at an overdose from being charged for **simple possession** or for **violation of pre-trial release, probation order, conditional sentence, or parole related to simple possession**, if the evidence in support of that offence was obtained or discovered as a result of seeking assistance or remaining at the scene. This applies to any person at the scene upon the arrival of assistance, including the person who overdosed.



Please refer to Bill C-224 for details.



OVERDOSE, CALL 911 UNTIL HELP ARRIVES

THE LAW DOES PROVIDE PROTECTION FROM CHARGES FOR:

Simple possession (personal use)

Violation of pre-trial release, probation order, conditional sentence, or parole related to simple possession

THE LAW DOES NOT PROVIDE PROTECTION FROM CHARGES FOR:

Selling illegal drugs (trafficking)

Offences other than drug possession

Any outstanding arrest warrants

Violation of pre-trial release, probation order, conditional sentence, or parole for an offence other than simple possession

Objectives of GSDOA Evaluation Project

- 1** ***Why do/don't people call 9-1-1 in the event of an opioid overdose?***
What is the trend of calling 9-1-1 before and after the implementation of the GSDOA?
- 2** What are the knowledge, attitude and experiences of GSDOA and intent to call 9-1-1 among ***people who have experienced, witnessed or responded to an overdose?***
- 3** What are the knowledge, attitude and experiences of the GSDOA and intent of calling 9-1-1 among ***youth aged 16-24 years old?***
- 4** What are the knowledge, attitude and experiences of the GSDOA and responding to 9-1-1 calls among ***police?***

Nested within these objectives is also an ***overarching objective and opportunity to educate participants in the study about the GSDOA***, the legal protection the Act offers and the aim of the Act, which is to encourage people to call 9-1-1 in the event of an overdose

The Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act (GSDOA) Evaluation Project

Unlocking the Gates Program

- The Unlocking the Gates Peer Health Mentoring Program aims to support people in the first 3 days after release from prison. As part of this program, a survey is administered before release.
- Questions were added to assess knowledge of the GSDOA and access to naloxone.

Interviews with youth

- Youth between the ages of 16-24 years old will also be invited to participate in a more in-depth one-on-one interview over the phone

Online surveys with youth

- To determine whether there are differences in youths' knowledge, and attitudes around the GSDOA, youth between the ages of 16-24 will be invited to complete a survey online.
- Foundry is a network of health & social service centres for young people, and will be supporting province-wide recruitment

Interviews with people with living/lived experience of substance use

- People with living/lived experience of overdose and/or witnessing overdoses will be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview over the phone to share their experiences of overdose and calling 9-1-1 as well as their knowledge, understanding and attitudes around the GSDOA.



Take home naloxone (THN) administration form

- THN program provides overdose response training and kits containing naloxone. Administration forms are submitted after naloxone has been used. Data is entered and analysed to explore if 9-1-1 was called and, if not, why.
- Changes in trends before & after GSDOA implementation were examined.

Harm reduction client survey (HRCS)

- The HRCS is an annual survey assessing substance use trends, and the use of harm reduction supplies among clients accessing harm reduction supply distribution sites in B.C. Questions were added to assess clients' knowledge of the GSDOA

Key informant interviews with police officers

- 22 interviews have been conducted with municipal police officers in: West Vancouver, Vancouver, Victoria, Abbotsford and RCMP officers in: Prince George, Kelowna, Vernon, Campbell River
- Preliminary findings will be shared soon.
- Based on findings, educational materials will be developed and piloted with participating police departments

Take home naloxone surveys

- People picking up a Take Home Naloxone kit at THN sites were identified as being at risk of experiencing or witnessing an overdose.
- Clients will be invited to complete a survey about their experiences of overdose and calling 9-1-1 as well as their knowledge and attitudes towards the GSDOA. The survey will also be available online.

Quantitative analysis from the 2019 Harm Reduction Client Survey (HRCS)

Who did we hear from...

- 621 respondents from 22 harm reduction supply distribution sites across B.C.
- Majority of the survey respondents were:
 - men
 - aged 30-49 years
 - had stable housing
 - were unemployed
 - obtained services in medium or large urban areas

When was the data collected...

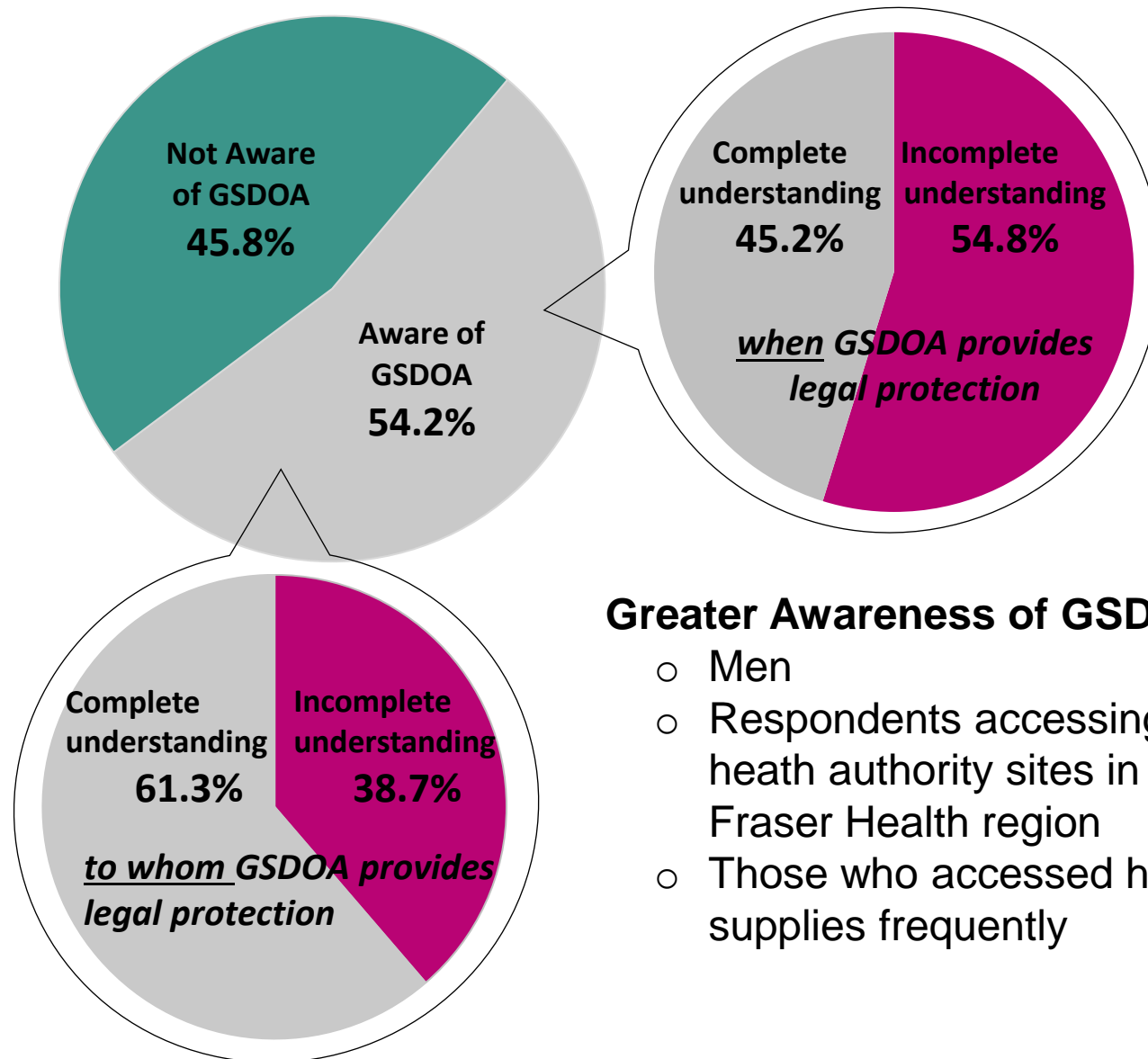
- Between October 2019 to January 2020

What statistical analysis was used...

- Descriptive Statistics
- Multivariable logistic regression



Findings HRCS re Awareness and Understanding of GSDOA



Greater Awareness of GSDOA was among:

- Men
- Respondents accessing services in non-health authority sites in Interior and Fraser Health region
- Those who accessed harm reduction supplies frequently

Findings from qualitative interviews with police officers across BC

Who did we hear from?

- 22 municipal and Royal Canadian Mounted Police officers across BC
(*Vancouver, North Shore, Abbotsford, Victoria, Campbell River, Kelowna, Vernon, Prince George*)
- 19 male, 3 female
- Ages 30-51 years old
- Experience levels 1.5 - 28 years in policing

When did we conduct interviews?

- Between January-May 2020

What methods were used to analyze interviews?

- Thematic analysis
- Open-coding to inductively build a coding framework
- Collaborative and iterative process between team members



What were police officers' views and understanding of the GSDOA?

Knowledge of the GSDOA:

- Officers **understood the Act as encouraging a medical vs. a law-enforcement approach** to overdose
- Many officers **could not clearly articulate its tenets** and when and for whom it applies
- A prominent narrative was the Act was **enacted in everyday practice before the GSDOA**

How the GSDOA has actually played out: checking IDs, arrests, etc.:

- Despite the GSDOA promoting overdoses as a health issue rather than a criminal one; **elements of law enforcement prevail in overdose contexts** and the **GSDOA can be adapted based on police officers' discretion**

Conclusion:

Three years after GSDOA introduced, a lack of awareness and understanding of the Act remains among:

- people accessing harm reduction supplies
- police officers attending the overdose events.

Next Steps:

Comprehensive and widespread interventions should be introduced to increase the awareness of the GSDOA among:

- People who are less likely to access the harm reduction services.
- Law enforcement officials.

We hope you enjoyed our presentation. Thank you!

References

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For more information....

- **About the GSDOA study, please:**

Visit: <https://towardtheheart.com/research-projects>

Or contact: Jessica Xavier, jessica.xavier@bccdc.ca – GSDOA Research Coordinator

- **About the qualitative component with police officers, please contact:**

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- **About the quantitative findings from the Harm Reduction Client Survey, please contact:**

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