

## FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH LOW RATES OF ENGAGEMENT IN OPIOID SUBSTITUTION TREATMENT AMONG PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN ATHENS

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**Background:** In 2016, the estimated population size of high-risk people who use drugs (PWUD) in Greece was 17,067, of whom over 50% were in Athens. This population experienced an HIV outbreak during 2011-2013 (HIV prevalence: 16.5%) and HCV prevalence is high (85%). Opioid substitution treatment (OST) is an evidence-based intervention that can reduce the risk of HCV/HIV transmission. Aim of this analysis is to assess the factors associated with engaging in OST in a sample of PWUD reached in the centre of Athens.

**Methods:** In 2018, a study was implemented in the centre of Athens to elucidate the anthropogeography of PWUD. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by assigned street-work team members, who approached individuals in open drug scenes in Athens. To be eligible, a participant should have been  $\geq 18$  years old, with use of psychoactive substances during the previous week. Participants provided written informed consent form and participation was anonymous. Multiple logistic regression was used to identify factors associated with engagement in OST and odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (95% CI) were estimated.

**Results:** In a period of 3 weeks, 200 PWUD participated; their mean (SD) age was 37.5 (9.4), 79.9% were men and 32.8% reported country of origin other than Greece (mainly from East Europe, North Africa/Middle East, Balkans). Overall, 45.5% were currently homeless while 56.1% used to stay/sleep out during the nights. Intravenous use was reported from 45% of participants while 63.5% reported heroin as the main substance used. Only 24.8% reported being engaged in OST. The factors that were associated with OST engagement were nationality (OR(95% CI) Greek vs. Other: 5.15 (1.66, 16.01), p-value=0.005) and homelessness (OR(95% CI) No vs. Yes: 3.17 (1.37, 7.33), p-value=0.007)(adjusted for age and gender).

**Conclusion:** A large proportion of active PWUD in the centre of Athens are not engaged in OST with homeless and migrants being a particularly underserved population.

**Disclosure of Interest:** none