



INSIGHTS

THE SMALL RURAL TRIBAL BODY-WORN CAMERA PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

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Saving Lives: BWC Footage, Opioid Overdoses, and Naloxone

The Tempe (AZ) Police Department and Arizona State University recently completed a study that reviewed body-worn camera footage to assist with the opioid crisis and de-mystify the use of naloxone by police. Primary author and researcher, Dr. Mike White, said that, “through BWCs, we witnessed Tempe officers save lives by using intranasal naloxone. These were stunning results – in 168 incidents, officers were able to save 159 lives.”

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Overdose deaths resulting from opioid use have increased over the last five years. The COVID-19 pandemic made things worse especially in rural America. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2020, the age-adjusted rate of drug overdose deaths increased 31% compared to 2019. Adults aged 35-44 experienced the highest rates of drug overdose deaths while young people aged 15-24 experienced the greatest percentage increase in deaths.

Police are often the first responders to overdoses, but there are numerous questions about the appropriateness of officers administering naloxone. These include – worries about increased civil

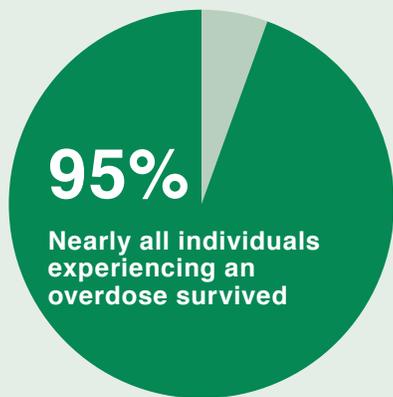
or criminal liability and administering naloxone incorrectly; fears of accidental exposure to opioids; potential aggressiveness from recovering individuals and/or their friends and families; and the ‘criminalization’ of overdoses by arresting the user or acquaintances.

Through a careful review of BWC footage the research team answered these questions and found the following:

- Of the 168 cases, the police arrived before the fire department 74% of the time
- Individuals were unconscious in 89% of the calls
- Nearly all individuals experiencing an overdose survived (95%) and 84% were transported to the hospital
- No cases of improper naloxone administration or accidental opioid exposure to an officer
- Aggression toward police was rare (4%)
- Arrests of survivors (4%) and others (1.2%) were infrequent

The study supports the use of naloxone by police, but the “effort should be grounded in harm reduction, de-emphasize arrest, and provide training that prepares officers to diagnose an overdose, administer naloxone, and engage with survivors.”

The article, published in the American Journal of Public Health can be found [here](#).



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