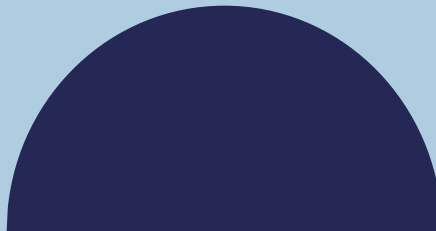


# Expanding the Horizon: The Value of Next-of-Kin Interviews and How They Affect the Participant

Kelsey Tambasco\* and Carina Havenstrite,\* Former Lackawanna  
County, Pennsylvania, District Attorney's Office

Shiryl Henry Barto, MEd, Program Evaluation and Research Unit,  
University of Pittsburgh

\*Currently Opioid Affected Youth Initiative, Institute for  
Intergovernmental Research



# Site Information

- **County:** Lackawanna County
- **City, state:** Scranton, Pennsylvania (PA)
- **Year OFR began:** 2019
- **Estimated number of overdose deaths per year:** 80
- **Population:** 215,896
  - Largely rural
  - 48 million+ people within a 4-hour drive
- **Funding sources:** Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Program (COAP)/Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP)



# The Value in Next-of-Kin Interviews

- **Provide support** for someone grieving a loss
- Gain firsthand **knowledge of the decedent**
  - Family history
  - Personality
  - Life struggles
- Help gather data on **early childhood experiences**
  - Age of first substance use
  - Issues while in school
  - Parental struggles



# Next-of-kin Interviews



- Starting in 2020, the overdose fatality review team (OFRT) used next-of-kin (NOK) interviewing to **attain information**. Only **completed** NOK cases were reviewed.
- The OFRT prioritizes **accessing, documenting, and organizing** available NOK contact information (email addresses, home addresses, phone numbers).
- Our team wanted to ensure that we were gathering high-quality information while supporting families. OFRT became interested in evaluating the NOK interview process and identify potential improvements.
- Ultimately, we realized NOK interviewing was one of our greatest tools to discover more effective overdose prevention strategies.



# Driven to Improve



During the writing of our FY 22 COSSUP grant, the idea was formed to partner with the Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy to **evaluate** our NOK interview process.

The overarching evaluation goals included:

- Improved data quality and accuracy
- Enhanced sensitivity and trauma-informed approaches
- Identification of gaps in information gathering
- Increased participation rates
- Refined prevention strategies
- More standardized procedures

The logo for the Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU). The letters "PERU" are displayed in a bold, serif font. The "P", "E", and "U" are in a dark blue color, while the "R" is in a bright yellow color. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

# Survey Development



- We began with the development of the **Introduction Letter**: mission/why, anonymity, honesty.
- Question Development:
  - How interview was conducted
  - Length of interview
  - Interviewer interaction
  - Comfort level
  - Benefits
  - Support resources
  - Additional comments
  - 31 questions total (some questions only appearing based on certain answers)

# Survey Deployment



- Options for **electronic and written** submissions
  - QR code and online survey were created
  - Written/paper format
- Using our NOK tracking, began contacting **all past interviewees**
  - Physically mailed the survey packet
  - Also sent an email version
  - Both were done to get as many people to answer as possible
- All responses were sent to a **University of Pittsburgh** address or email account
  - This ensured that all responses would be **anonymous**

# Survey Results



- 16 surveys were completed out of the 50 mailings, for an overall response rate of **32%**.
- These questions were able to provide insight on **how the NOK felt** during the interview.
- This data informed **recommendations** around updating all our current procedures.

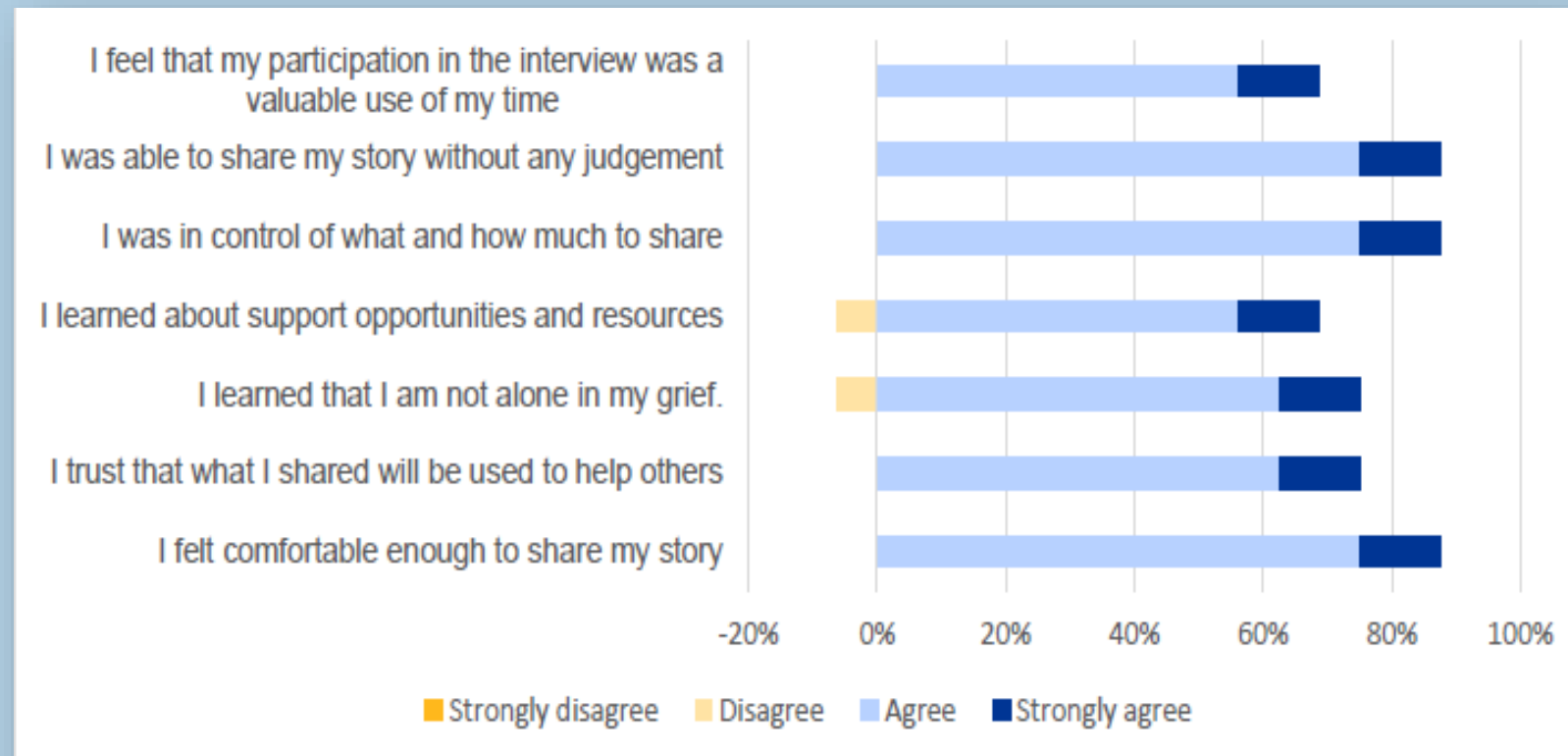


FIGURE 3. PERCENT AGREEMENT FOR INTERVIEW CONTENT (N = 14)



# Results (Continued)

- The most impactful result was around the question of “**who benefits**” from these interviews.
- This indicated to us that these interviews are positive for the NOK themselves and **allows them to feel** that their story has impact.
- We understand that NOK interviews after overdose deaths are always difficult, but these data show that interviews can be **beneficial to the families.**



**TABLE 1. WHO BENEFITS FROM THE INTERVIEW? (N = 19)**

Participation in the interview was beneficial to...	Frequency
The overdose fatality review team	14
Myself	9
Others in my position	8
I did not feel my participation was beneficial	2
N/A	3

# Open-ended Responses



- Two participants indicated that **follow-up would be beneficial** so they would know how the interview information was used.
- One participant indicated that they were **thankful** for the interview.
- One participant shared that they hoped that someone learns that **addiction is a disease with a root cause** that needs to be found and addressed.
- Six participants **shared resources** or programs they felt would be beneficial to help prevent future overdoses.
- Most participants **expressed gratitude** for the OFR reaching out and letting them tell their stories.
- One participant mentioned that they hope the **outcomes are used** appropriately.

*"I think continuing follow-up to let family know of any direct results/changes implemented as a result of the review team's interviews would be appreciated."*

*"Addiction is a disease with a root cause that needs to be found and addressed."*

*"I do hope information provided by families helps to add services + make changes. Hopefully it is not just a way to secure additional grants that are not utilized appropriately."*

# What Was Learned



- The evaluation process was extremely **beneficial for our team.**
- Helped us **see gaps and needs** in our grief resources.
- **Gained insight** into the true benefit of our NOK interviews.
- **Provided real feedback** on our process and what the participants feel.
- **Provided additional data** to the OFR team on a topic that is often not analyzed.



# Driven to Improve



The overarching evaluation goals included:

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PERXU

# In Summary

- NOK interviews are difficult but worthwhile.
- NOK interviews benefit the families (those interviewed) AND the OFR process.
  - **Provide support** for someone grieving a loss.
  - Gain firsthand **knowledge of the decedent**.
  - Help gather data on **early childhood experiences**.



# Contact Information



## **Kelsey Tambasco**

*Former* Data/Fiscal Analyst and OFR Facilitator

Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania, District Attorney's Office

[ktambasco@iir.com](mailto:ktambasco@iir.com)

## **Shiryl Henry Barto**

Program Implementation Specialist

Program Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU)

University of Pittsburgh

[shb210@pitt.edu](mailto:shb210@pitt.edu)