



## Lexington-Fayette Substance Use Disorder Initiative

### Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Kentucky is a state with one of the highest rates of opioid deaths in the United States. Within Kentucky, it was reported there were a total of 1,247 overdose related deaths in 2018. In 2019, the number of deaths associated with overdoses increased to 1,316. Of the overdose deaths in Kentucky from 2017-2019, a majority were individuals 25-54 years old. More specifically, in 2019, a majority of deaths were found in the 35 – 44 year olds, with a total of 366 deaths. The substances utilized by those suffering from substance use vary and include but are not limited to Cocaine, Fentanyl, Methamphetamine, etc. (Noble & Ingram, 2020).

Fast forwarding to 2020, terminology has changed significantly in the field of drugs and drug addiction. Drug abuse and drug addiction are no longer considered a poor coping mechanism, or consistently overindulging in illegal substances; in recent years, it has been recognized as a disease. Today, the appropriate terminology is *substance use disorder*, which is defined as a disease that impacts an individual's brain and behavior and can lead to an inability to control the use of legal or illegal drugs or medication (Mayo Clinic, 2020). As researchers at the Mayo Clinic continue to explain, when you are addicted, individuals may continue to use the drug, despite the harm it causes to the individual or family.

### Research Methods

Research was conducted to gain diverse perspectives regarding substance use disorder and the resources available in the Lexington/Fayette County area. Through the use of face-to-face interviews, questions were asked to address the following constructs;

1. Examine diverse community perspectives regarding the identities of individuals with substance use disorder in Lexington.
2. Discover and determine community leaders' awareness of and accessibility to resources provided to those with substance use disorder in Lexington.
3. Examine diverse community perspectives toward public responsibility regarding substance use disorder and the treatment thereof in Lexington.

The research conducted in the initiative was done through interviews via Zoom. The participants of the interviews were community leaders who are working on the front lines of substance use disorder. The researchers who conducted the interviews were two young professionals from the Community Innovation Lab, at the University of Kentucky. One research conducted interview, while the other researcher recorded non-verbal and visual observations. The interviews were approximately an hour, with a total of seven community leaders participating in 6 interview sessions (one session was joint between two individuals). Each participant was invited to be interviewed through email and a date was scheduled. On the day of the interview, participants were briefed on the purpose of the interview and were assured the confidentiality of their identity, as well as their answers. The interview consisted of 10 base questions<sup>11</sup>, while some questions led to follow-up questions for further clarification.

There were several limitations to this research. In general, the overall purpose of the research was to give voice to individuals associated with the issue of substance use disorder; therefore, the findings of this study were meant to be illustrative and cannot be generalized beyond the participant audience. Other limitations include sample size. We recognize the sample size of seven individuals is small; however, they were purposively selected due to their leadership roles within the community. A final study limitation was we were not able to secure an interview with previous or current users.

## **Results by Construct**

**NOTE: Participants (as identified below) are community leaders who are working on the front lines of substance use disorder.**

Construct 1:

**Examine diverse community perspectives regarding the identities of individuals with substance use disorder in Lexington.**

- There needs to be a resource available that helps ensure the basic necessities of an individual such as food, shelter, income, etc.
- Of the participants we interviewed, they all had a mutual understanding that Substance Abuse Disorder affects everyone

Construct 2:

**Discover and determine community leaders' awareness of and accessibility to resources provided to those with substance use disorder in Lexington.**

- Participants felt there is a need for 24-hour access to resources and programs
- Participants stressed the importance of securing and retaining funding
  - A recognized need for long-term commitment from the government on all levels (local, state, and federal) in regard to financial support
- Participants felt a lack of collaboration and communication is occurring among the multiple entities that work with substance use disorder
- There was a lack of knowledge of resources available among the participants

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview questions and charts located in Appendix

- There was an unclear understanding of the actions taken by entities across the Lexington/Fayette county area

Construct 3:

**Examine diverse community perspectives toward public responsibility regarding substance use disorder and the treatment thereof in Lexington.**

- Participants wanted to see intervention after the initial in-patient or out-patient program lifelong intervention
- Participants wanted to see substance use prevention during the early childhood stage
- Participants felt that addressing substance use disorder was a collective responsibility
- Need for strategic programs towards the different types of addictions
- Need for community education regarding stigma and language of substance use disorder
  - Need for community support following education

Macro Themes Across Constructs:

- Participants felt that change is more likely to occur when those in power are personally affected
- Participants felt there was a problem with time constraints for intervention and interactions
- There was a desire for family support and services
- Participants felt frustrated, exhausted, and devastated about the impact substance use had on communities

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the field of substance use disorder within the Lexington/Fayette County area is a complicated web. There seems to be some confusion on resources and programs—How many there are, and what they do. There also is not enough communication between civic leaders. We found that while there has been research for Substance Use Disorder, the research is single faceted and only caters to one substance. Our participants are passionate about helping those who suffer from substance use disorder, however, they need support both financially and patience from the local, state, and federal government.

**Recommendations**

Based on the data collected, there are a few actions that we would suggest to strengthen the efforts across the Lexington/Fayette area in regard to substance use disorder. Firstly, there needs to be education among the residents of the Lexington/Fayette area. There also needs to be a complete list of resources and centers of those who specialize in helping those with substance use disorder. Open Communication with individuals helping with substance use needs to be created so collaboration and real-time updates among resources can be achieved. There also needs to be increased availability of resources, particularly overnight or 24-hour support centers for individuals with substance use disorder who want to seek help as soon as possible.

Another recommendation for the future is having a complete list of resources with electronic and paper copies. This increase the likelihood that everyone will have access to this list regardless of

class. Another thing that is recommended is a semi-annual or annual summit for individuals who are dedicated to helping those with substance use disorder. This would be an open forum for anyone interested. This will give the opportunity for everyone (community members, civic leaders, etc.) to get familiar with one another making it easier to see what all the resources are and to address shortcomings and challenges.

Finally, there is still a lot that can be learned about substance use disorder, particularly within the Lexington/Fayette County area. Future research should include gathering the perspectives of local community members who are not directly associated with substance use disorder. There should also be research done that gathers the perspectives of previous and current users. Another suggestion would be to formulate research that is centered around emotional intelligence and how that relates to individuals working through internal problems within themselves.

## References

2018 Drug Overdose Death Rates. (2020, March 10). Retrieved November 22, 2020, from  
<https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/data/statedeaths/drug-overdose-death-2018.html>

Mayo Clinic. (2020, November 23). *Drug addiction (substance use disorder)*. Mayo Clinic.

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112>

Noble, M. C., & Ingram, V. 2019 Overdose Fatality Report. Kentucky: Office of Drug Control Policy; n.d. 20p.

## Appendix I - Interview Questions

- 1) When I say the term “substance use” what first comes to mind?
  - a) What substances do you first think of?
- 2) Take a minute to reflect. When you visualize someone with substance use disorder, who do you visualize? Describe the person you see?
- 3) Describe a few experiences, if any, you have had with individuals with substance use disorder?
- 4) What do you think are the leading causes for substance use?
  - a) Which do you think is the leading cause?
- 5) How do you feel about the impact of substance use on your community?
- 6) In your opinion, whose responsibility is it to address substance use disorder?
- 7) From your perspective, what resources are available for individuals experiencing substance use?
  - a) Who funds these resources?
  - b) Which are the most accessible for substance users?
- 8) From your individual perspective, what do you believe to be the most effective methods for rehabilitation for those experiencing substance use disorder?
- 9) Please describe what steps/actions have been taken to address the prominence of substance use here in Lexington/Fayette County?
  - a) Which organizations are currently working to address these issues?
- 10) What steps/actions do you believe should be taken to further address substance use in our community?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss or add to?

\*\*\*END OF INTERVIEW

