



Title: Patients' Journey to Substance Use Recovery
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Aims: The aim of this study was to create a substance use disorder patients' journey map of treatment experiences starting with substance use and access to medications up to outcomes and recovery in Puerto Rico.

Methods: This is a qualitative study with twenty key informants with opioid use disorder and alcohol use disorder. Participants age range between 32 to 65 years old. An informed consent were completed, and several clinical scales. An individual interview was recorded related to topics about trigger event/awareness, help seeking, care treatment, behavioral/lifestyle change, and ongoing care. Our approach was phenomenological with the health belief model as conceptualization. The interviews were transcribed, and a content analysis was performed using NVivo for Mac.

Results: Initial substance use typically began in adolescence, with a mean age of onset at 17 years. Marijuana and alcohol were the predominant first substances used, while 25% initiated directly with harder drugs. Family history played a significant role, with participants reporting substance use among relatives, primarily among first-degree family members. Risk factors emerged predominantly during childhood, related to family violence/abuse, deaths, peer pressure and traumatic events often predating actual substance use by several years. Overdoses with opioids were common, but professional medical intervention and Narcan usage were relatively low. Participants received informal "street remedies" as their primary form of care. Participants understood treatment as more than just medication, recognizing both physical and psychological aspects. The barriers to receive treatment were related to transportation issues, services denied without proper documentation, withdrawal symptoms and cravings, long waiting times for services, anxiety and depression.

Conclusions: The findings highlight the complex interplay between personal, social, and systemic factors in substance use trajectories, emphasizing the need for early intervention and comprehensive support systems. Participants' experiences underscore the importance of accessible, continuous care and family involvement in the recovery process.