



# Opioid Overdose: Increasing 911 Calls Through Good Samaritan Law To Save Lives

Kim Lan St-Pierre  
Family Medicine Resident  
Université de Sherbrooke

*Centre intégré  
de santé et de  
services sociaux de  
la Montérégie-Centre*

Québec 

# Background

- Opioid overdose is the leading cause of accidental death in North America
- 4000 deaths in Canada in 2017
- 94% accidental (unintentional)
  
- 911 calls (Emergency Medical Services) made in **30-65%** of overdoses

Special Advisory Committee on the Epidemic of Opioid Overdoses. National report: Apparent opioid-related deaths in Canada (January 2016 to March 2018) Web-based Report. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; September 2018.

[Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Use \(CCENDU\)](#). Calling 911 in Drug Poisoning Situations, March 2017.

# Good Samaritain Law to reduce barriers to 911 calls

- Introduced May 2017
- Protects bystanders and victims from:
  - Charges for possession of a controlled substance (i.e. drugs) under section 4(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act
  - Breach of conditions regarding simple possession of controlled substances in:
    - pre-trial release
    - probation orders
    - conditional sentences
    - Parole
- The act **does not** provide legal protection against more serious offences, such as:
  - outstanding warrants
  - production and trafficking of controlled substances
  - all other crimes not outlined within the act

# Objectives

- Explore facilitating factors and barriers to calling 911
- Determine factors influencing arrest by police officers
- Evaluate impact of the Good Samaritan Law (GSL) on intention to call 911 and subsequent arrest
- Identify potential solutions

# Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act (GSL)

Soupçonnez une

**S**URDOSE?

**O**btenez de l'aide

**S**ans hésiter

**APPELEZ LE 911**

ou votre numéro d'urgence local

La Loi sur les bons samaritains peut vous protéger contre des simples accusations de possession.

Ensemble, nous pouvons mettre  
**#FinAuxSurdoses**

**SOYEZ  
AU FAIT**

DRUGS: GET THE FACTS.  
CONNAÎTTEZ LES RISQUES.

Renseignez-vous sur [Canada.ca/Opioids](https://Canada.ca/Opioids)



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Canada

**S**uspect an  
**O**VERDOSE?  
**S**tay and

**CALL 911**

or your local emergency number

The Good Samaritan law can protect you from simple drug possession charges.

Together we can **#StopOverdoses**

**KNOW  
MORE**

DRUGS: GET THE FACTS.  
KNOW THE RISKS.

Learn more at [Canada.ca/Opioids](https://Canada.ca/Opioids)



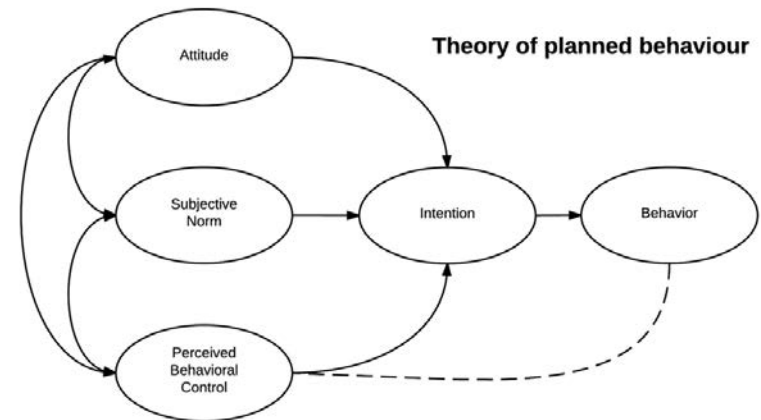
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# Methods I

- Qualitative study
- Semi-structured interviews
- Interview guide based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)
  - Theoretical model whose central hypothesis is intention predicts behaviour



# Methods II

- Phase 1: September 2017
- Phase 2: August 2018
  
- Interviews transcribed verbatim
- Codified deductively based on the theory of planned behaviour (TPB)
- Emergent themes analysed

# Sample

- Convenience sample
- Peri-urban region of Montreal (Montréal, Quebec)
  
- Police officers  $n = 9$ 
  - 3 (Sept 2017)
  - 6 (Aug 2018)
- Opioid users  $n = 8$ 
  - 8 (Sept 2017)
  - Recruited from Community outreach and harm reduction centre
  - IV drug use



# Results I: Opioid Users

- Reluctance of opioid users to call 911 (barriers)
  - Fear of arrest
  - Fear of reprisals from peer users
  - Difficulty in recognizing overdose signs and symptoms
- Facilitator: desire to save a life, wanting to do “the right thing”

## Results II: Police Officers

- Discretionary power of arrest in overdose cases
- Ambivalence between security and repression objectives vs health and harm reduction practices

# Results III: Good Samaritan Law

- GSL remains misunderstood or unknown by both law enforcement officers and opioid users
- Does not reduce fear of arrest in most opioid users
  - Users doubt police officers will protect their rights
  - Does not protect from production or trafficking
- Police officers have not received training and question its applicability in practice

# CBC News, Aug 2018

## Despite 'Good Samaritan' law, many drug users too scared of arrest to report overdoses



Police involvement deterring people from calling 911 during an overdose, despite legislation



Elise von Scheel · CBC News · Posted: Aug 18, 2018 4:00 AM ET | Last Updated: August 18



<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/good-samaritan-drug-overdose-fentanyl-politics-parliament-1.4786094>

# Verbatims- Opioid users

- « Tu ne veux pas faire embarquer personne... parce qu'après ça, si quelqu'un est dans la marde parce que tu as appelé la police, je ne donne pas cher de ta peau. »
- « Je ne savais pas que ça ressemblait à ça... je pensais qu'il dormait. Avoir su, j'aurais appelé. »
- « S'il y a de la "dope" sur la table, demain ou dans deux semaines, ils vont revenir. »
- « Moi, si on doit sauver la vie d'une personne, je me câlisse du respect, de ce que les autres pensent. [...] Même s'il y a d'autre monde, je leur dirais : "Fais ce que tu as à faire; moi j'appelle l'ambulance". »

# Verbatims – Police officers

- « La personne qui vend, je vois ça comme de la criminalité vraiment. Parce que lui, il fait juste rendre tout le monde addict. »
- « Mais en tant que policier, j'aime ça arrêter du monde, j'aime faire ma job. »
- « On ne cherche pas pantoute, on fait de l'aveuglement volontaire. [...] Des fois, [les consommateurs] oublient [de la drogue], mais on regarde à gauche quand ça traîne à droite. »

# Verbatims on Good Samaritan Law

- « Je trouve que c'est bien, car ça ne les immunise pas de tout, mais ça protège leur sécurité pour les encourager à appeler les services d'urgence. [...] Même avant le projet de loi, on travaillait dans ce sens-là. »
- « Je ne pense pas que les policiers vont fermer les yeux s'il y a de la drogue... Je suis sceptique. »

# Discussion



Data triangulation

Theoretical model (TBP) used to construct interview guides

Saturation reached for police officers



Recruitment difficulties during phase II: No opioid users interviewed one year after GSL implementation – impossible to assess impact on attitude and behaviour

All opioid users recruited from same community outreach center

Desirability bias



# Recommendations to prevent fatal overdoses

- Educate opioid users on how to recognize an overdose
- Increase awareness of the Good Samaritan Law
- Train police officers concerning appropriate application of GSL and interventions to modify attitude towards harm reduction practices
- **Medical presence (paramedics) exclusively in overdose calls?**

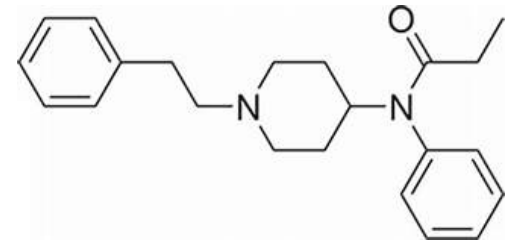
# Questions?

- Thanks to Dr Huy Hao Dao, Dr Lanthier-Veilleux, Dre Julie Loslier
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- Police force: Longueuil, Ste-Hyacinthe, Valleyfield



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# Sources

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*Loi sur les bons samaritains secourant les victimes de surdose*, LRO 2017, c 4, art 2.

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