

Characteristics of women initiated on opioid substitution therapy at primary health care level in Tshwane, South Africa

Authors: Daniela S. Goeieman^{1,2} (MPhil in Family Medicine student), Robert Mash¹ (Supervisor), Natasha R. Gloeck^{3,4} (Co-supervisor), Andrew Scheibe⁴

1.Division of Family Medicine and Primary Care, Stellenbosch University

2.Division of Clinical Associates, Department of Family Medicine and Primary Care ,University of the Witwatersrand.

3.South African Medical Research Council

4.Department of Family Medicine, University of Pretoria

28 September 2023



Introduction

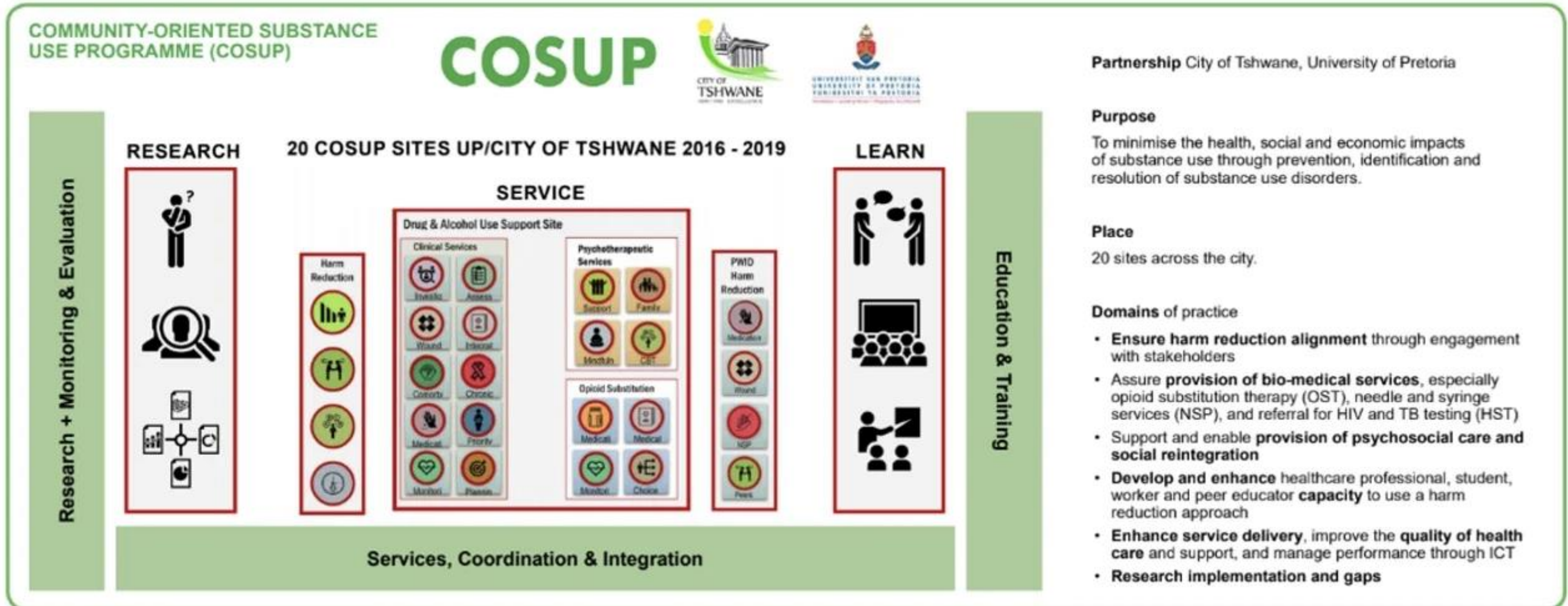
In South Africa, alcohol and cannabis prevail, alongside a concerning rise in opioid use disorders.(2)

Women who use drugs (WWUD) face

- higher HIV rates,
- intimate partner violence,
- and limited access to gender-sensitive interventions.
- Recruiting WWUD to participate in studies on OST retention and prevalence of HIV and Hepatitis C is challenging.(3,4)



Introduction



Aim and objectives

Aim:

To describe the characteristics of female substance users on OST for opioid use disorder at the COSUP, between 2016 and 2022.

Objectives:

1. To describe the socio-demographic characteristics of females on OST.
2. To describe the substance use practice and substance related harms in females on OST.
3. To determine the factors associated with retention of females initiated on OST.

Methods

- **Study Design**

Descriptive observational study using existing data collected by COSUP from 2016 to 2022.

- **Setting**

Community-based COSUP clinics in the City of Tshwane, South Africa, offering OST services.

- **Participants**

199 adult cis/transgender women (> 16 years old) with opioid use disorder on OST.

- **Data collection**

Data from electronic OST database and paper-based files were used, covering demographics, substance use practice, employment, risk factors, OST details and retention.

- **Data analysis**

Data were analysed with the **Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS)** and associations of variables with retention on OST for > 6 months* were analysed.

Poly-drug use was assessed by combining the individual ASSIST scores to create a mean total ASSIST score.

Kruskal-Wallis test - assess factors associated with retention (that were not a normally distributed numerical variable) and nominal categorical variables

Mann Whitney U test - assess the association with retention across binary categorical variables

Spearman's Correlations - assess the relationship between retention and ASSIST scores

**COSUP defines retention as uninterrupted OST for 6 months.*

Results

Table 1: Characteristics of women upon initiation of opioid substitution therapy

Variable	n (%)
Age on initiation (N=183)	
16-19 years	2 (1.1)
20-29 years	81 (44.3)
30-39 years	77 (42.1)
40-49 years	15 (8.2)
50-59 years	8 (4.4)
Race (N=199)	
Black	133 (66.8)
Coloured	17 (8.5)
White	44 (22.1)
Indian	5 (2.5)
Gender (N=199)	
Cisgender women	198 (99.5)
Transgender women	1 (0.5)
Pregnant (N=125)	
	24 (19.2)
Employment status (N=184)	
Unemployed	174 (94.6)
Employed	6 (3.3)
Self-employed	4 (2.2)
Type of health facility providing OST services (N=199)	
Community venues run by non-governmental organisation	56 (37.0)
Community venues run by University of Pretoria	8 (4.0)
PHC facilities run by non-governmental organisations/University of Pretoria	77 (38.7)
PHC facilities run by local municipality	18 (9.0)
PHC facilities run by provincial government	25 (12.5)
District hospitals	8 (4.0)
Regional hospital	7 (3.5)

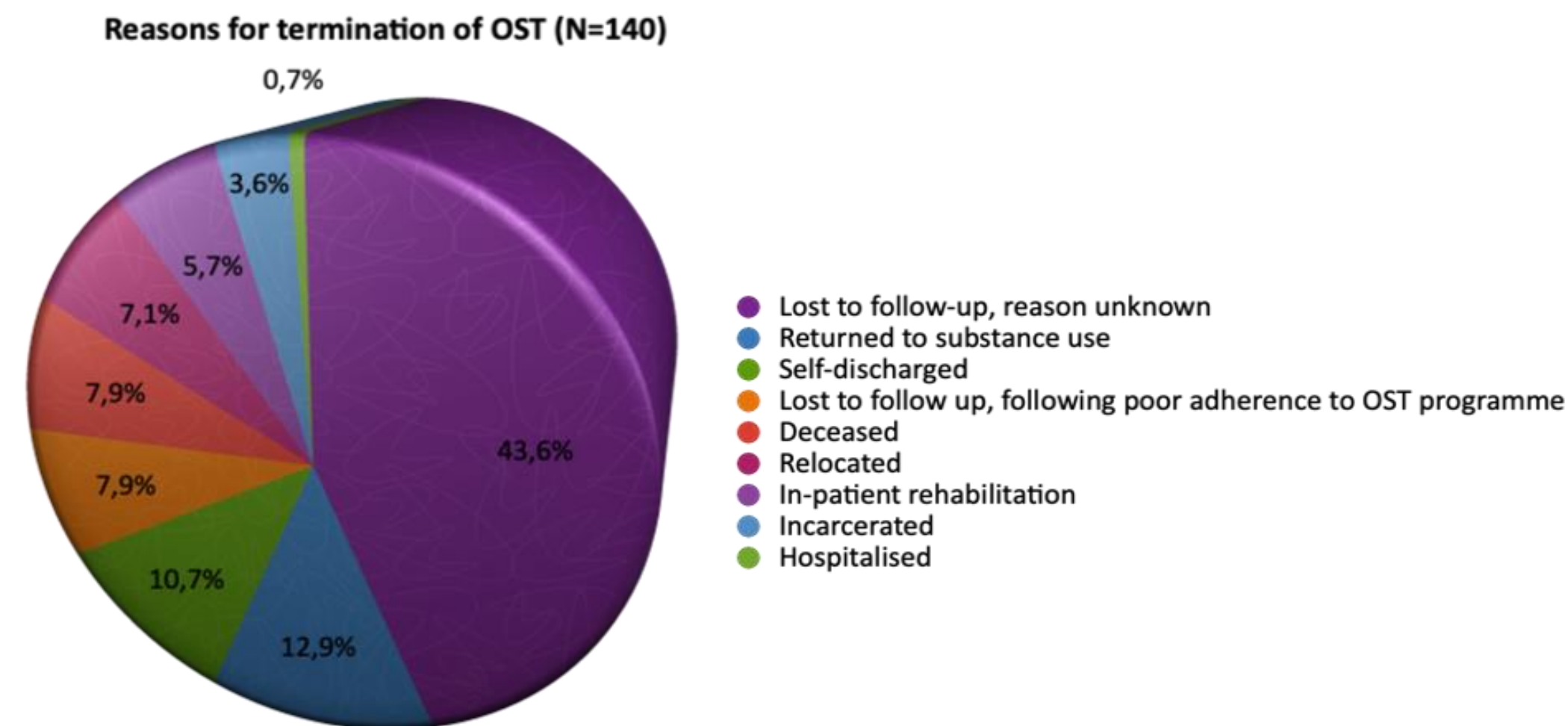


Figure 1

Retention on OST was significantly associated with

- **age** at initiation ($p=0.047$),
- knowledge of **HIV status** ($p=0.029$),
- an **increase in the ASSIST score** ($r=0.171$, $p=0.023$),
- daily methadone **dose more than 40mg** ($r=0.339$, $p<0.001$).

Discussion

Summary of key findings

- The majority of women on OST were young, unemployed and accessed OST from non-governmental facilities.
- Lost to follow-up was the primary reason for discontinuation.
- Factors promoting retention included higher age at OST initiation, knowing HIV status, higher total ASSIST score, and adequate methadone dosing.

Discussion

Limitations

- Characteristics do not typify women using opiates - did not include those who were not accessing OST (e.g. women accessing NSP from COSUP).
- Inferential statistics may have lacked power to compare variables.
- Study design limits the ability to establish causal relationships or draw conclusions about the effectiveness of OST for women with an opioid disorder.
- Did not allow examination of how recruitment and management practices at the various facilities may have influenced the population's characteristics

Conclusion

Implications for Evidence-Based Practice



Acknowledgements

The authors extend their heartfelt appreciation to the women enrolled in OST whose data and stories made this study possible.

Special thanks go to the dedicated COSUP staff, particularly Mrs. Pamela Ntombela and Mr. Siyanda Senti, for their invaluable support and commitment during the collection data.

References

1. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. World Drug Report. Vienna: UNODC [homepage on the Internet]. c2020 [updated 2021 June; cited]. Available from: <https://wdr.unodc.org/wdr2020/index.html> [Internet]. Vienna ; 2021 Jun [cited 2022 Feb 23]. Available from: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/wdr2021.html>
2. Dada S, Harker Burnhams N, Erasmus J, Lucas Charles Parry W, Bhana Sandra Pretorius A, Weimann R. South African community epidemiology network on drug use. SACENDU report 2020. [Internet]. 2021 Dec. [cited 2022 Feb 23]. Available from: <http://www.mrc.ac.za/adarg/sacendu.htm>.
3. Lefoka MH, Netangaheni TR. A Plea Of Those Who Are Affected Most By HIV: The Utterances By Women Who Inject Nyaope Residing In The City Of Tshwane Municipality, Gauteng. Afr J Prim Health Care Fam Med. 2021 [cited 2022 Feb 27];13(1):1–9. Available from: doi: 10.4102/phcfm.v13i1.2416
4. International AIDS Society. Women Who Inject Drugs: Overlooked, yet Visible. [Internet]. 2019 [cited 2022 Feb 6]. Available from: . https://www.iasociety.org/Web/WebContent/File/2019__IAS__Brief__Women_who_inject_drugs.pdf
5. World Health Organisation, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. International standards for the treatment of drug use disorders: revised edition incorporating results of field-testing [Internet]. Geneva: WHO, UNODC; 2020. 1–112 p. Available from: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/331635>

Thank You.