

RECRUITMENT METHODS FOR EPIDEMIOLOGIC RESEARCH ON HEPATITIS C AMONG RURAL YOUNG ADULTS WHO INJECT DRUGS

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Background:

Rural communities in the U.S. are epicenters of Hepatitis C (HCV), fueled by opioid injection, syringe sharing, and a historically weak harm reduction infrastructure. However, methods for epidemiologic research on HCV among PWUD were developed predominantly in urban contexts. This study explores the feasibility of using web-based strategies to recruit rural, young adult PWUD into epidemiologic research.

Methods:

Recruitment occurred from August 2017 to April 2018 in a rural Appalachian Kentucky community using a combination of WebRDS and outreach strategies tailored to rural areas (i.e., community cookouts held in gas station and grocery parking lots). Inclusion criteria included being age 18–35, recent (past 6 month) opioid use to get high, and living in the 5-county study area. Prospective participants completed an extensive online eligibility screening (e.g., quizzes assessing knowledge of the local community and opioids to verify residence and substance use, respectively) which underwent cognitive testing with PWUD. Preliminary data were analyzed to determine yield of recruitment methods.

Results:

As of April 2018, 243 people were screened for eligibility; 99 were eligible and 84 participated. Project cookouts were most effective in enrolling people into the online screening (25.5% of those screened); however, a substantial proportion of these were ineligible (64.5%). Of the 22 eligible PWUD recruited via cookouts, 19 completed the survey and referred a total of 27 others into the screening using WebRDS; 92.6% of whom were eligible. Thus, 48.8% of the sample was directly or indirectly attributable to recruitment cookouts. Other more traditional recruitment strategies (e.g., flyers posted in health and social service agencies) have yielded relatively few eligible participants (n=7).

Conclusion:

Though web-based recruitment methods have successfully recruited marginalized populations in urban areas, our study indicates that web-based methods need to be complemented by context-tailored, street-outreach activities such as cookouts to recruit rural PWUD.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

This research was funded by a grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH R21 DA042727) to Drs. Cooper and Young.