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FROM ANALYSIS TO SOCIAL INNOVATION. THE AGING PROCESS OF PEOPLE WHO USE DRUGS IN OPIOID SUBSTITUTION TREATMENT: DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE CARE SCENARIOS AND TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR SOCIAL AND HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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Background

The number of people who use drugs (PWUD) in opioid substitution treatment (OST) aged more than 50 (50+) has increased of at least 400% in Switzerland in the last 15 years. Despite the growing size of this population, its specificities are little known. This is an unfortunate condition, that represents a major challenge for social and health institutions: aging PWUD cumulate physical, psychological and social problems that generate specific needs which are difficult to treat in traditional care settings. As a result, these patients are in a "no man's land" between the institutional network for PWUD, on the one hand, and the institutional network for elderly people, on the other hand. To address this problem, we planned an interdisciplinary and participatory research project in Southern Switzerland to generate new knowledge on the aging process of PWUD in OST and to implement this knowledge in the drug care system.

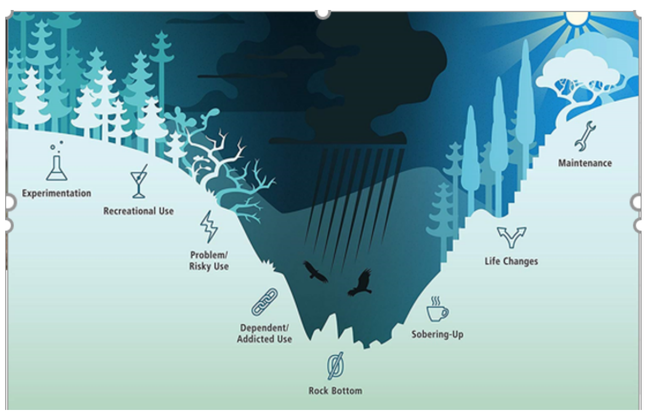
Methods

A 2 years research project was planned on a 4 steps basis: 1) an epidemiological analysis based on official national data on PWUD on OST and prospective data from the SAMMSU (Swiss Association for the Medical Management in Substance Users) cohort, to describe social and health conditions of PWUD 50+ in OST and to estimate their lifespan and the probability of disease and disability; 2) a sociological qualitative study to analyze life's trajectories and lifestyles of PWUD 50+ in OST, performed through interviews to selected patients; 3) an organizational study to explore the strategies of social and health professionals to face PWUD 50+ in OST, involving different practitioners with experience with the care of addiction and/or elderly people ; 4) an open discussion on results of step 1, 2 and 3 in focus groups with social and health professionals with different profiles to develop innovative and grounded care scenarios and training programs.

The aging process of PWUD on OST: a neglected phenomenon

Drug addiction as youth problem

(Stimson & Oppenheimer 1982)



«Maturing out» thesis

(Winick 1962)

Switzerland 2014
Age groups
Until 19 years
20-24 years
25-29 years
30-34 years
35-39 years
40 ans et pland more
Total

Statistical invisibility

(Official website of national statistics of substitution treatments)

The aging process of PWUD on OST: an expanding phenomenon

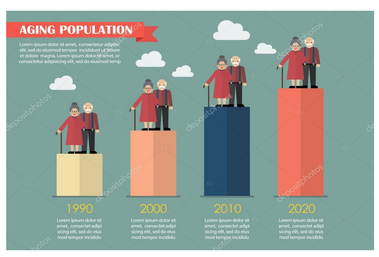
PWUD in OST in western societies		
USA: 50+ (Gfroerer et al. 2003)	2000: 1.7 mio	2020: 4.4 mio
Europa: 40+ (Gossop 2008)	2002: x	2005: 2x
Australia: età media (Burns et al. 2009)	1986: 29 y.o.	2006: 37 y.o.

PWUD in OST in Switzerland	1999	2016
No. PWUD	17'907	17'746
No. PWUD 40+	1'305	9'386 (3'249 > 50 y.o.) + 600%

PWUD in OST In Ticino	1999	2016
PWUD in OST	749	850
PWUD in OST 40+	139	667 (307 > 50 y.o.) + 300%

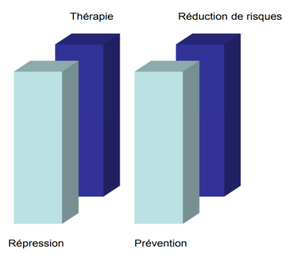
http://www.substitution.ch/fr/statistiques_annuelles.html&year=2016&canton=ti

The aging process of PWUD on OST: associated factors and future challenges



Demographic factors

Clinical factors



Political factors

Health conditions, lifespan estimation, prognostic models

Trajectories and lifestyles

Theoretical challenges

Practical challenges

Practitioners' burnout
(Nicou & Rappo 2012)

Cumulation of physical, psychic and social problems
(Grella & Lovinger 2012)

Institutional «no man's land»

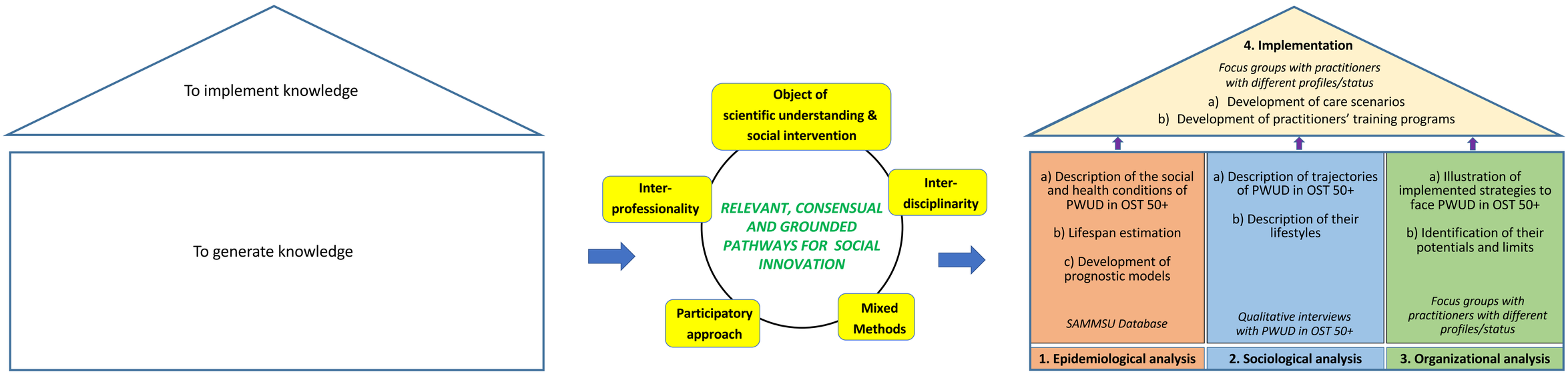
Results

In September 2018, 41 key persons from the field of addiction medicine, psychiatry, social work, nursing, home care, elderly care, community care and local health authority, were invited to a first plenary event of the study group. People were involved in the research project and agreed to collaborate to the following phases of the study. They will be interviewed to give their experience in the management of aging PWUD on OST and to share their opinion, issues and proposal on the topic (step 3).
Data analysis on the SAMMSU cohort database is ongoing to give a picture of demographic characteristics, social status and comorbidities and to possibly estimate the burden of disease and the expected lifespan in this population (phase 1).
The social and health professionals involved in the study will also help to guide the interviews to patients for the qualitative part of the study, investigating life trajectories and lifestyle of aging PWUD on OST (phase 2).

Conclusion

Combining three planned phases of epidemiological analysis, sociological analysis and organizational analysis and working in a interdisciplinary research approach, we aim to generate knowledge on the new scenario of the the aging process of PWUD in OST. The results of the first 3 phases will be discussed in the last phase of the study, with the implementation of innovative models of intervention in this new care scenario and the proposal of tailored training programs for practitioners operating on the field.

Growing old with addiction (GOLD): goals, principles and study design



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- Department of Health and Social Affairs, Canton of Ticino

Duration of the study:
- 5.2018 – 4.2020