Thinking Beyond the Biomedical: How Structural and Social Factors Impact Substance Use

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Overview

1. Population level trends in drug use and overdose

2. Social determinants impacted by the collateral consequences of the drug war

3. Structural solutions for a structural problem
Provisional Drug Overdose Death Counts


Provisional Drug Overdose Death Rate per 100,000

North Carolina Opioid and Substance Use Action Plan Data Dashboard

Racial Disparities in Drug Overdose Deaths, Age-adjusted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2019-2020</th>
<th>White, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Black, Non-Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian, Pacific Islander</th>
<th>Am Indian, Alaskan Native</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% Increase</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data Source: National Center for Health Statistics - National Vital Statistics Survey, CDC Wonder
NH: Non-Hispanic
Disparities in Drug Law Implementation

Adult Population, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lifetime Illicit Drug Use (18+), 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

State Prison for Drug Offenses, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Federal Prison for Drug Offenses, 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lifetime Illicit Drug Use (18+), 2020

- White: 70%
- Black: 11%
- Other: 19%

State Prison for Drug Offenses, 2020

- White: 43%
- Black: 33%
- Other: 24%

Federal Prison for Drug Offenses, 2020

- White: 25%
- Black: 33%
- Other: 42%

NSDUH, 2020; Data.census.gov;
Latimore (2020) https://www.americanscientist.org/blog/macroscope/ending-the-war-on-drugs

Root Causes: Racial Discrimination and SUD-Related Stigma

**Dominant cultural distinguishes and labels**
- The establishment of hierarchical race groups as a social construct
- Race-based medicine

**Assigns negative attributes and links deviance and stereotypes to labels**
- Fabrication of Black inferiority to justify slavery
- Racial tropes about crime, drug use, and poverty

**“Us” vs “Them” narrative created, physical and social isolation, blame, and shame**
- Residential segregation and other exclusionary practices that reinforce cycles of poverty
- Circular reasoning to justify over-policing

**Status loss and discrimination; experience of stigmatization**
- Experience of government-sponsored discrimination, unrelenting police surveillance, daily microaggressions

**Race**
- Criminalization of SUD, stigmatizing language
- Demonization of drugs, legal designations lacking scientific basis

**Substance Use Disorder**
- Promulgation of SUD stereotypes
- Links to other disparaged groups (e.g., racialized drug narratives) or recast as victims w/o agency

Experience of shame, demoralization, disenfranchisement
Collateral Consequences Last a Lifetime

Source: GAO analysis of the American Bar Association’s National Inventory of the Collateral Consequences of Conviction (NICCC). | GAO-17-691
The Amplification of Overdose Risk

Figure Credit: AIR CARES Webinar Series: Social Determinants of Addiction. https://www.air.org/webinar-series-social-determinants-addiction

Discrimination against people who use drugs

SUD Stigma
Criminology assigned to people who use drugs has been used to justify the exclusionary and dehumanizing responses to the overdose crisis

Punitive Drug Laws
52% of people with Rx opioid use disorder has experienced arrest

Limited Treatment Access
30% of state prisons offer MOUD
5% in jails receive MOUD
>50% of high-need-counties did not have a single buprenorphine provider

Housing Discrimination
People with SUD excluded from public housing benefits despite HUD guidance

Employment Discrimination
Hiring practices and work environments violate ADA

Food Discrimination
Food insecurity common but people with SUD excluded from SNAP/TANF and/or subject to drug testing

Loss of Drivers License
Due to fees, community supervision requirements

Structural and social determinants of addiction
Inequitable Implementation of Laws
People of color use at same rate but are more likely to face arrest and charges, longer jail time and community supervision.

Inequitable Use of Screening
Toxicology results used inequitably for employment, housing, probation/parole, and family regulation systems.

Employment Discrimination
People of color face more barriers to employment.

Racial Housing Discrimination
People of color continue to face housing discrimination through residential steering and landlord, lending, and appraisal discrimination.

Food Deserts
22% of Black and 7% of White households food insecure. Many choose between food, housing (57%) and transportation (66%).

Residential Segregation
Communities of color experience oversurveillance, lack of affordable housing, less access to food, fewer transportation options.

Racial Bias in Rideshare Algorithms
Neighborhoods with larger non-white populations and higher poverty levels associated with higher fare prices.

Structural and social determinants of addiction

Potential Levels of Intervention
- **SUD Stigma**
  - Engage in self-reflection on views of drugs and people who use them; Use of stigmatizing language
  - Patient-centered engagement; Apply harm reduction approaches; Listen to people who use drugs
  - Integrate and standardize addiction care; Discontinue punitive practices; Provide foundational SUD training
  - Remove barriers to treatment access; Stigma reduction in medical community and broadly
  - Advocate for removing laws that restrict access to basic needs and disenfranchise; Advocate for parity law accountability
  - Authentically engage people who use drugs as full partners; Conduct research to challenge unjustified barriers to care

- **Racial Equity**
  - Continuous self-reflection; Interrogate own implicit bias and assumptions about race
  - Support patients in overcoming structural barriers to health
  - Provide structural competency training and support; Institutionalize diversity, equity, and inclusion
  - Community advocacy and organizing for structural change, desegregation and integration
  - Advocate for restorative justice policies, universal healthcare and Policies that improve SUD workforce diversity
  - Study race as a structural feature (vs genes and culture); Listen to diverse voices

How Prohibition-Based Drug Policy Increases Fatalities

1. Creates an unregulated market
   a. Drives violence
   b. Inconsistent, toxic products
2. Drives stigma → social isolation
3. Tool of oppression for minoritized and poor people
   a. Oversurveillance
   b. Collateral consequences → Economic and political isolation
4. Fear of accessing services
5. Rushed injections, isolation
6. Increased infectious disease
7. Excessive incarceration – overdose post-release
8. Lack of evidence that it decreases problematic use

Citations: Csete (2016) Lancet
State Cannabis Laws, 2022

- State with medical cannabis laws
- States that have removed jail time for possessing small amounts of cannabis
- States that have both a medical marijuana law and have removed jail time for possessing small amounts of marijuana
- Marijuana is legal for adults and is taxed and regulated similarly to alcohol; state also has a medical marijuana law
- Marijuana is legal for adults (no sales); medical marijuana law (DC ONLY)

Emerging Drug Laws

- Bills Introduced: KS, ME, MD, RI, VT, WA
- Bills Pending: MA, NY

Decriminalization of Most Personal Possession, 2022

- November 3, 2020
  Passed, 59%
- November 3, 2020
  Passed, 76%

Source: https://lawatlas.org/datasets/sentinel-surveillance-of-emerging-drug-decriminalization-legislation
Changes in Drug Use After Cannabis Reform

Past Year Cannabis Use

Changes in Drug Use After Cannabis Reform

Past Month Cannabis Use

Ages 12-20

Ages 21-30

Ages 31 - 40

Ages > 40


Changes in Drug Arrests after Cannabis Reform

Source: ACLU (2020) A Tale of Two Countries: Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform
Outcomes from Cannabis Reform

Drug Arrests in States With Legalized Marijuana (Before 2018)

Drug Arrests in All States that Decriminalized Marijuana (between 2010-2017)

Source: ACLU (2020) A Tale of Two Countries - Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform

Changes in Arrest by Type of Reform


Source: ACLU (2020) A Tale of Two Countries - Racially Targeted Arrests in the Era of Marijuana Reform
Barriers to Impact

- Regulation (market and consumer impact)
- Decriminalization and legalization of use without sales
- Sufficient funding for support services
- Reversing harms of drug war
- Net-widening and use of citations

- Absence of place to purchase decriminalized drugs
- Compensatory police action, Street-level bureaucracy
- Court discretion
- Insufficient funding for programs
- Criminal sanctions for non-compliance
- Overmedicalization
- Challenges with record clearance
- Social and economic isolation

Restorative Justice and the Drug War

Restorative Justice policies can rebuild disinvested communities, prevent intergenerational trauma, interrupt the unjust carceral cycle, and restore dignity to victims of the war on drugs:

- Discontinue over-policing communities of color and avoid criminal justice solutions for medical conditions; ensure fair sentencing and minimize street-level bureaucracy

- Fund employment (and employer) training with a real path to a livable-wage jobs and re-entry services

- Support families affected by punitive drug policy

- Remove the economic, civic, and social exclusions related to substance use

- Focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion - Keep people with lived experience central
References


References


