



Short Communication

Trends in Drug Overdose Deaths in the United States

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With the mortality rate due to drug overdoses more than doubling since the 21st century, the United States is experiencing a public health crisis from overdose deaths. We recently analyzed mortality data from the World Health Organization database to determine overdose death trends from 2001 to 2015 across 13 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [1]. Our results suggest that the U.S. has the highest drug overdose mortality rate for both men and women (20 deaths in 100,000 women; 35 deaths in 100,000 men) in 2015, more than double those of any other country in the study. The rates increased by 5.3%/year in women and 4.3%/year in men between 2001 and 2015 [1]. Many factors drive drug overdose death trends, such as the availability of pharmaceutical opioids, prescribing practices, illicit drug use, opioid substitution treatment, and the prevalence of chronic pain.

In the US, “triple epidemic waves” of death due to opioids have been documented. The first wave of prescription opioid mortality started in the late 1990s, followed by a second wave of heroin deaths beginning from 2010 and now a third wave of deaths related to synthetic opioids, including illicitly manufactured fentanyl and fentanyl analogues [2]. The increase in U.S. overdose deaths also varied by race/ethnicity. While opioids are the main contributor to overdose deaths among non-Hispanic White individuals, cocaine-related overdoses account for most deaths among non-Hispanic Black individuals [3]. Therefore, understanding specific drugs contributing to overdose deaths is important as it provides essential scientific evidence for strategies to combat the current U.S. drug overdose epidemic.

References

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