Landscapes of Despair: Population Health and the Opioid Crisis

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Tackling private problems instead of public issues is like...

All-Cause Mortality Rates are Higher and Rising in Nonmetro and Medium/Small Metro

All-Cause Mortality (ages 25-64) by Metro Status, 1999-2015

Data Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC Wonder. Multiple Cause of Death Files.

Note: Rates are age-adjusted.
Drug Mortality Rates Highest Outside of the Largest Metropolitan Areas

Drug-Induced Mortality (age 25-64)

Data Source: CDC WONDER, Underlying Cause of Death Files, 1999-2015
Drug-Related Mortality, (age 25-64), 2006-15

Data Source: CDC WONDER, Multiple Cause of Death Files, 2006-2015 (pooled)
Percentage of all Drug-Related Deaths Involving Specific Drugs, by Metro Status

Rx opioids more prevalent among nonmetro drug deaths; heroin more prevalent among metro drug deaths.
Percentage of all deaths involving opioids has increased for both males and females across all age groups.

Data Source: CDC WONDER, Multiple Cause of Death Files, 1999-2015
Shift in the Spatial Distribution of Deaths involving Opioids, 1999-2015
(age-adjusted, deaths per 100,000 population)
Long-term demographic implications

The Lonely Women of the Rust Belt - The Atlantic

'All the Men Here Are Either on Drugs or Unemployed'

The disappearance of manufacturing and the rise of opioid abuse has hit men in the Rust Belt hard. That's meant women are left to pick up the pieces.

ALANA SEMUEL | MAY 9, 2017 | BUSINESS

Hiring Hurdle: Finding Workers Who Can Pass a Drug Test

By JACKIE CALMES | MAY 17, 2016

The opioid crisis is straining the nation’s foster-care systems

White Deaths Exceed Births in One-Third of U.S. States

November 29, 2016
By: Rogelio Saenz, Kenneth M. Johnson
Substantial Comorbidity
Percentage of Counties in Top Quartile of Drug Mortality also in Top Quartile of other Health and Mortality Indicators (Industrial Midwest Counties)

Data sources: CDC WONDER; RWJF County Health Rankings
Mortality data are pooled 2006-15
Percentage of Counties in Top Quartile of Economic Distress also in Top Quartile of Health and Mortality Indicators (Industrial Midwest Counties)

Economic Distress: % working-age (25-54) poverty, % working-age unemployed/not in labor force, % w/out 4-year degree, % 21-64 w/work disability, % HH w/supplemental security income, % HH w/public assistance income (alpha=.898)
“This was not new; it had been happening for fifteen years. And there was more to it than drugs. This scourge was...connected to the conflation of big forces: economics and marketing, poverty and prosperity. Forgotten places of America acted like the canaries in those now-shuttered Appalachian coal mines. Just no one in the country listened much until more respectable types sounded the same alarm.” – Sam Quinones

“Reflects social conditions that prevailed decades prior, but dynamics playing out now.” - Jenn Beam Dowd, 10/03/17
Going Forward

• Research challenges – DATA!!

• Unanswered questions/challenges
  • Have opioids simply replaced other unhealthy “coping mechanisms” that were taking longer to kill people?
  • What do we mean by “deaths of despair”? What should count?
  • UCD files mask a lot of what is happening.
    • Can we REALLY disentangle drugs, alcohol, suicide?
    • Suicides are often misclassified/undercounted; undercounting is non-random, drug deaths especially prone to misclassification (Ian Rockett)
Can we REALLY disentangle drugs, alcohol, suicide?

• About 1/3 of suicide decedents have alcohol in their blood at time of death (varies significantly across demographic subgroup and geography)

• For a variety of reasons, suicides are undercounted (varies significantly across demographic subgroup and geography)
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• Increase in % of heart disease deaths that involve drugs/alcohol
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  • **What role have state policies played? (OBRA, devolution)**
  • Interactions between SES and place
Policy

• The cliché that “addiction does not discriminate” is only sort of true.
• We can’t Narcan our way out of this. The problem is bigger than opioids.
• Don’t forget the social components (anomie).
• Metabolic diseases still biggest killers (by far).
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The views expressed in this presentation are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of these organizations.

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Extra Slide
Hillbilly heroin: the painkiller abuse wrecking lives in West Virginia

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<td><strong>Total Number of Drug Arrests Reported</strong></td>
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