Demographic and Geographic Variation in Drug Overdose in the United States

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The Opioid Crisis and the Labor Market
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Big Picture Takeaways

1. Our problem is bigger than opioids.

2. Overdose rates are much higher among some groups and in some places than others.

3. Economic conditions and labor markets matter.
• Over 1,000,000 drug overdose deaths in U.S., 1999-2021

• Opioids are the primary contributor, but cocaine, methamphetamine, and prescription benzodiazepine involvement has also increased.

• Methamphetamine-involved deaths doubled 2019 to 2021.

• Methamphetamine is now the second largest contributor to overdose deaths after fentanyl.
Which Demographic Groups Have the Highest Drug Overdose Rates?
Trends in Fatal Drug Overdose Rates among Males by Race, 1999-2020

Data Source: NCHS CDC WONDER
Trends in Fatal Drug Overdose Rates among Males by Race, 1999-2020

Data Source: NCHS CDC WONDER
Trends in Fatal Drug Overdose Rates among Females by Race, 1999-2020

Data Source: NCHS CDC WONDER
Trends in Fatal Drug Overdose Rates among Females by Race, 1999-2020

Data Source: NCHS CDC WONDER
Ranking of Overall Fatal Drug Overdose Rates by Age Group and Race/Ethnicity for Males and Females, 1999-2020

Data Source: CDC WONDER Online Database.

Note: AIAN=American Indian/Alaska Native

Rates highest among...
- AIAN males and females 25-64
- Black males 35-64; Black females 35-54
- White males and females 25-54

Black
American Indian
White

Deaths per 100,000 Population
Which Places Have the Highest Drug Overdose Rates?
Is the Drug Overdose Crisis Disproportionately Rural?

Rural America in Crisis: The Changing Opioid Overdose Epidemic

What's Behind the Addiction Crisis in Rural America?

Why Is The Opioid Epidemic Hitting Rural America Especially Hard?

The opioid crisis is at its worst in rural areas. Can telemedicine help?
The Drug Overdose Crisis is Not Disproportionately Rural

Fatal Drug Overdose Rates by Metro Status

Data Source: National Vital Statistics System. Notes: Rates are age adjusted. Metro status is based on USDA county classifications.
Fatal Drug Overdose Rates by County, 2000-2020

Data Source: NVSS Restricted Mortality Files
What Place-Level Factors Predict Higher Drug Overdose Rates?


Overdose rates are pooled from 2006-2015 and are age-adjusted; predictors are measured in 2000.

- Separated/divorced, %
- Not working, %
- Per capita opioid prescribing
- Public assistance receipt, %
- No 4-year college degree, %
- Single parent families, %
- Poverty, %
- Jobs in mining, %
- Vacant housing units, %
- Jobs in retail, services, food, %
- Income inequality
- Jobs in business/professional, %
- Jobs in FIRE, %
- Jobs in manufacturing, %
- Jobs in farming, fishing, forestry, %
McDowell County, WV
10th highest OD rate in US

Scioto County, OH
5th highest OD rate in US

Portsmouth, Ohio, once known for making things (steel, shoes, bricks), is now known for drugs, and labeled by some as the “pill mill of America”. The city peaked at 40,000 people in 1940, and as it emptied of factories and jobs - some made obsolete, some moved away - it also emptied of people and hope.

Now it is a town half the size, filled with despair and filling with drugs.

Chris Arnade, The Guardian, May 2017

Data Source: NVSS Restricted Mortality Files
Takeaways

• Overdose trends vary across demographic groups and geography.
  • Highest among American Indian males and females 25-64, White males and females 25-54, Black males 35-64, and Black females 35-54.
    • These are prime labor force age groups.
  • Highest in Appalachia, Industrial Midwest, parts of desert Southwest.
• Economic change (dislocation) and labor markets have played a big role.
• Our problem is bigger than opioids.
Thank you.

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