

EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

**CORONAVIRUS, 11 June 2021**

**JOURNAL ARTICLES**

---

**The impact of COVID-19 on opioid treatment program (OTP) services: Where do we go from here?**

Tracy, K; Wachtel, L; Friedman, T

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 131, 108394

Medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) services is key to addressing the opioid crisis and COVID-19 has significantly impacted MOUD delivery. The need for social distancing and self-quarantining requires individuals to maintain personal physical space and limits face-to-face interactions, which are required for methadone dispensing and other regulated treatment activities. Mount Sinai Beth Israel, which has one of the largest opioid treatment service (OTP) delivery systems within the United States and included 10 OTP methadone clinics that responded rapidly by implementing procedures to address the additional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. This article discusses four key procedural areas: 1) verified identity in-person pick-up doses, 2) drug urine toxicology screens, 3) treatment interactions, and 4) discharges, which can inform future OTP operational procedures by encouraging out-of-the-box thinking in this new age.

**Coronavirus lockdown: Excessive alcohol consumption and illicit substance use in DUI subjects**

Beccegato, E., Angiola, F., Favretto D., et al

Traffic Injury Prevention

4 June 2021

DOI: 10.1080/15389588.2021.1923701

**Objective:**

This study investigates the consequences of the SARS-CoV-2 outbreak and of the resulting control measures on alcohol and illicit substance use in a high-risk population for substance-related disorders, utilizing an integrated medico-legal and toxicological approach.

**Methods:**

The research was structured as a retrospective case-control study of subjects found to be driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol and/or other psychoactive substances who were examined for driver's license regranting. Alcohol and/or drug use was assessed by comparing cases examined in the period from May to August 2020 (immediately after the lockdown in Italy) to control subjects examined in the same period in 2019. DUI subjects were examined by an integrated approach, descriptive analyses were conducted, and significance was determined by chi-square and Mann-Whitney tests. Variables linked to the pandemic outbreak and resulting lockdown were investigated as predictive factors in determining unfitness to drive.

**Results:**

Cases (281) were significantly different from controls (261) concerning the judgment of unfitness to drive ( $p < .001$ ) and had more subjects with chronic excessive alcohol use and/or illicit substance use. The two groups were rather homogeneous concerning the other variables, except for a difference in blood alcohol concentration (BAC) at the time of DUI ( $p = .027$ ). No statistical association was found between the investigated variables linked to the lockdown and the judgment of unfitness to drive.

**Conclusions:**

Chronic excessive alcohol consumption and illicit substance use were more frequently observed in cases, which suggests a possible correlation between the pandemic/lockdown restrictions and an increase in psychoactive substance misuse. While these potentially correlative factors are discussed in this article, they require further study. If confirmed, the results should be considered in forensic and clinical settings.

### **Opioid use disorder and COVID-19: Implications for policy and practice**

Mitchell, M; Shhe, K; Champlin, K; et al  
Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants  
34, 6, p.1-4, 2021

Preliminary data suggest that opioid-related overdose deaths have increased subsequent to COVID-19. Despite national support for expanding the role of physician assistants (PAs) and NPs in serving patients with opioid use disorder, these clinicians are held to complex and stringent regulatory barriers. COVID-19 triggered significant changes from regulatory and federal agencies, yet disparate policies and regulations persist between physicians and PAs and NPs. The dual epidemics of COVID-19 and opioid use disorder highlight the inadequate infrastructure required to support patients, communities, and clinicians, and may serve as the catalyst for eliminating barriers to care.

### **Drug and alcohol positivity of traumatically injured patients related to COVID-19 stay-at-home orders**

Young, K N; Yeates, E O; Grigorian, A; et al  
American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse  
4 June 2021  
doi: 10.1080/00952990.2021.1904967

#### **Background:**

COVID-19 related stay-at-home (SAH) orders created many economic and social stressors, possibly increasing the risk of drug/alcohol abuse in the community and trauma population. Objectives: Describe changes in alcohol/drug use in traumatically injured patients after SAH orders in California and evaluate demographic or injury pattern changes in alcohol or drug-positive patients.

#### **Methods:**

A retrospective analysis of 11 trauma centers in Southern California (1/1/2020-6/30/2020) was performed. Blood alcohol concentration, urine toxicology results, demographics, and injury characteristics were collected. Patients were grouped based on injury date - before SAH (PRE-SAH), immediately after SAH (POST-SAH), and a historical comparison (3/19/2019-6/30/2019) (CONTROL) - and compared in separate analyses. Groups were compared using chi-square tests for categorical variables and Mann-Whitney U tests for continuous variables.

#### **Results:**

20,448 trauma patients (13,634 male, 6,814 female) were identified across three time-periods. The POST-SAH group had higher rates of any drug (26.2% vs. 21.6% and 24.7%, OR = 1.26 and 1.08,  $p < .001$  and  $p = .035$ ), amphetamine (10.4% vs. 7.5% and 9.3%, OR = 1.43 and 1.14,  $p < .001$  and  $p = .023$ ), tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) (13.8% vs. 11.0% and 11.4%, OR = 1.30 and 1.25,  $p < .001$  and  $p < .001$ ), and 3,4-methylenedioxy methamphetamine (MDMA) (0.8% vs. 0.4% and 0.2%, OR = 2.02 and 4.97,  $p = .003$  and  $p < .001$ ) positivity compared to PRE-SAH and CONTROL groups. Alcohol concentration and positivity were similar between groups ( $p > .05$ ).

#### **Conclusion:**

This Southern California multicenter study demonstrated increased amphetamine, MDMA, and THC positivity in trauma patients after SAH, but no difference in alcohol positivity or blood concentration. Drug prevention strategies should continue to be adapted within and outside of hospitals during a pandemic.

### **Medicinal applications of cannabinoids extracted from Cannabis sativa (L.): A new route in the fight against COVID-19?**

Khalid, S; Almalki, F A; Hadda, T B; et al  
Current Pharmaceutical Design  
27, 13, p.1564-1578, 2021

Cannabis sativa is a well-known plant that has been recognized for its benefits since ancient times by several medicinal systems, including those of China, India, Greece, and Egypt. Although *C. sativa* is one of the most investigated medicinal plants in the world, it faces some of the greatest controversies surrounding its legalization and use as a medication. *C. sativa* contains several hundred phytoconstituents, including the infamous "cannabinoids". It is necessary to properly understand the medicinal importance of these phytochemicals and spread awareness among the countries where

cannabis is still facing legal obstacles. The current review focuses on the most recent literature pertaining to various applications of cannabinoids, with a special focus on the medicinal aspect of these phytochemicals. Peer-reviewed articles focusing on the importance of cannabis and cannabinoids are the target of this review. Articles were selected based on the relevance to the general scope of the work, i.e., application of cannabinoids. Cannabinoids can truly be regarded as wonder drugs, considering their immense diversity of usage. Unfortunately, however, many of the mares have never been researched biologically or pharmacologically due to their low yield in the plant. However, the approval of some cannabinoids by the FDA (along with other recognized national medical health systems) has opened the horizon for the use of these natural drugs in medicines such as Epidiolex® (cannabidiol, used for the treatment of severe forms of epilepsy) and Sativex®(δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol, used for the treatment of spasticity caused by multiple sclerosis). Many pharmacological properties of *C. sativa* are attributed to cannabidiol (CBD), a non-psychoactive component, along with δ9-tetrahydrocannabinol (δ9-THC), a psychoactive component. This review addresses the most important applications or current utilization of cannabinoids in a variety of treatments such as chronic pain, cancer, emesis, anorexia, irritable bowel syndrome, communicable diseases, glaucoma, and central nervous system disorders. The biosynthetic pathway of cannabinoids is also discussed. In short, cannabis has a myriad of bioactive compounds that have the potential to increase the list of approved cannabinoids suitable for therapy.

### **Perspectives of opioid use disorder treatment providers during COVID-19: Adapting to flexibilities and sustaining reforms**

Treitler PC, Bowden CF, Lloyd J, et al

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 132, 108514

#### **Objective:**

The COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented temporary federal and state regulatory flexibilities that rapidly transformed medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) treatment delivery. This study aimed to understand changes in treatment providers' care during COVID-19, provider experiences with the adaptations, and perceptions of which changes should be sustained long-term.

#### **Methods:**

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 New Jersey MOUD providers, purposively sampled to reflect diversity in provider setting, specialty, and other characteristics. Using a rapid analysis approach, we summarized content within interview domains and analyzed domains across participants for recurring concepts and themes.

#### **Results:**

MOUD treatment practice changes taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic included a rapid shift from in-person care to telehealth, reduction in frequency of toxicology testing and psychosocial/counseling services, and modifications to prescription durations and take-home methadone supplies. Modifications to practice were positively received and reinforced a sense of autonomy for providers as well as enhancing the ability to provide patient-centered care. All respondents expressed support for making temporary regulatory flexibilities permanent, but differed in their implementation of the flexibilities and the extent to which they planned to modify their own practices long-term.

#### **Conclusion:**

Findings support sustaining temporary regulatory and payment changes to MOUD practice, which may have improved treatment access and allowed for more flexible, individually tailored patient care. Few negative, unintended consequences were reported by providers, but more research is needed to evaluate the patient experience with changes to practice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Effect of COVID-19 disruptions on young adults' affect and substance use in daily life**

Papp, L. M., & Kouros, C. D.

Psychology of Addictive Behaviors

35, 4, p.391–401, 2021

#### **Objective:**

Guided by accounts of adjustment in daily life as a key indicator of health, the current study examined prospective changes in young adults' emotions and substance behaviors assessed during a normative baseline period and during the acute COVID-19 disruption period in late March/early April 2020. The COVID-19 assessment also collected psychosocial risk factors expected to moderate changes in adjustment across time.

#### **Method:**

Participants included 295 young adults (70.8% female; ages 18–21 at baseline), drawn from an ongoing study of daily behaviors and health in college life that oversampled for recent substance

behaviors, who completed both the baseline and COVID-19 assessments. Hypotheses were tested using analyses of repeated-measures data that included covariates of length of time between assessments and sampling group status.

**Results:**

Direct tests in support of hypotheses indicated an increase in negative affect ( $d = .67, p < .001$ ), and greater alcohol use ( $d = .75, p < .001$ ) and marijuana use ( $d = .58, p < .001$ ), in daily life across time. Levels of positive affect ( $d = .08, p > .05$ ), nicotine use ( $d = .01, p > .05$ ), and prescription drug misuse ( $d = .003, p > .05$ ) did not reliably change in tests of direct models. Moderation tests indicated several risk factors for experiencing steeper increases in negative affect, and increased likelihood of marijuana and nicotine use, in daily life across time.

**Conclusions:**

Findings offer implications for future research and clinical efforts to improve young adult adjustment in response to the pandemic.

**Isolation, solitude and social distancing for people who use drugs: an ethnographic perspective**

Roe, L ; Proudfoot, J ; Teck, T W ; et al  
Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2021, 11, 623032

COVID-19 has resulted in deepened states of crisis and vulnerability for people who use drugs throughout Europe and across the world, with social distancing measures having far-reaching implications for everyday life. Prolonged periods of isolation and solitude are acknowledged within much addiction literature as negatively impacting the experiences of those in recovery, while also causing harm to active users – many of whom depend on social contact for the purchasing and taking of substances, as well as myriad forms of support. Solitude, however, is proposed by the authors as inherent within some aspects of substance use, far from particular to the current pandemic. Certain forms of substance use engender solitary experience, even where use is predicated upon the presence of others. Adopting a cross-disciplinary perspective, this paper takes as its focus the urgent changes wrought by the pandemic upon everyday life for people who use drugs, drawing on recent ethnographic fieldwork with substance users in Scotland. Beyond the current crises, the paper proposes solitude, and by extension isolation, as an analytical framework for better apprehending lived experiences of substance use.

**The rapidly changing composition of the global street drug supply and its effects on high-risk groups for covid-19**

Browne, T ; Gold, M S ; Martin, D M  
Current Psychopharmacology  
10, 2, p.152-168, 2021

**Background:**

Globally, an alarming number of pharmaceutically active compounds are now routinely added to the street drugs of abuse, cocaine and heroin. In some cases, seventeen (17) or more potentially toxic compounds are found in a single street purchased bag or block of cocaine or heroin. Pharmacologically active compounds, impurities, or breakdown products from drug manufacturing and industrial chemicals (collectively referred to as toxic adulterants) are now found in street drugs. They include, but are not limited to: Antipsychotics, antidepressants, anxiolytics, antihistamines, anthelmintics, anesthetics, anti-inflammatory, antipyretics, analgesics, antispasmodics, antiarrhythmics, antimalarials, veterinary medications, bronchodilators, expectorants, sedatives, muscle relaxers, natural/synthetic hallucinogens, decongestants, new psychoactive substances (NPS), industrial compounds, fungicides, and impurities in the manufacturing process. All can be found within a single street purchase of heroin or cocaine. Routine clinical or workplace drug testing will not detect all these toxic adulterants. Only specialty forensic tests, specifically ordered, will detect them. The synergistic effect on the human body of such an unprecedented combination of pharmacologically active compounds is unknown and potentially deadly. This is especially seen in daily substance users who are exposed to these combinations multiple times a day over an extended period of time. Individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) have several co-occurring health problems that make them more susceptible to COVID-19, including compromised immune, pulmonary, cardiovascular, and respiratory systems. These problems are high-risk factors for the acquisition of COVID-19 infection and more serious complications from the virus, including hospitalization and death.

**Objective:**

The study aims to bring to the attention of public health officials, addiction medicine specialists, treatment officials, therapists, and the general public the alarming increase of dangerous toxic adulterants being added to street drugs and their potentially lethal synergistic effects. Also, it aims to

provide insights into how these new formulations can have serious pathophysiological effects on individuals with Substance Abuse Disorders (SUDs) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Methods:**

The literature on street drug cutting agents, toxic adulterants, NPS, manufacturing byproducts, and other industrial compounds will be reviewed. Also, a review of the literature of pathophysiological effects, especially on SUD patients, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic will be presented. This is combined with international and USA studies that were carried out by the Colombo Plan that identified these new combinations of toxic adulterants in street drugs, using state-of-the-art field and forensic laboratory detection technologies.

**Results:**

The majority of street drugs, in some cases more than ninety-five percent, now have multiple toxic adulterants. It is rare that a street purchase of cocaine or heroin does not contain multiple toxic adulterants, cutting agents, NPS, manufacturing byproducts, or industrial chemicals.

**Conclusion:**

This dangerous new composition in world street drug supply is unprecedented and may be the undetected cause of many psychostimulant and opioid overdose deaths, as many toxic adulterants are not routinely tested in post-mortem or street drug seizure cases. In addition, several of these toxic adulterants create a catastrophic drop in white blood cells, causing neutropenia and making the substance users susceptible to a wide range of opportunistic infections, including COVID-19. This profound change in the world street drug supply has catastrophic implications for individuals with SUDs and our health care system, especially in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**QT interval prolongation in COVID-19 patients on methadone treatment**

Sefidgarnia, M; Alaedini, K

Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, 2020, 14, 2, e104431

**“It’s just like a switch”: isolation from COVID 19 quarantine drove man into a suicidal drug relapse**

<https://www.oregonlive.com/coronavirus/2021/06/its-just-like-a-switch-isolation-from-covid-19-quarantine-drove-man-into-a-suicidal-drug-relapse.html>

**'Joints For Jabs': Washington approves free weed for people who get a covid vaccine**

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/washington-jabs-for-joints-weed-covid-19-vaccine\\_uk\\_60bf25f8e4b04aeb61bb4766](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/washington-jabs-for-joints-weed-covid-19-vaccine_uk_60bf25f8e4b04aeb61bb4766)

**Fentanyl overdoses in Alberta increased 118.4 per cent amid pandemic: U of A**

<https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/fentanyl-overdoses-in-alberta-increased-118-4-per-cent-amid-pandemic-u-of-a-1.5459630>

**Psychedelics for frontline clinicians with COVID-related burnout? A study is looking into it**

[https://www.forbes.com/sites/javierhasse/2021/06/08/psychedelics-for-frontline-clinicians-with-covid-related-burnout-a-study-is-looking-into-it/?sh=6c876d5a47c2&mc\\_cid=9090fbfe7d&mc\\_eid=ed25c68454](https://www.forbes.com/sites/javierhasse/2021/06/08/psychedelics-for-frontline-clinicians-with-covid-related-burnout-a-study-is-looking-into-it/?sh=6c876d5a47c2&mc_cid=9090fbfe7d&mc_eid=ed25c68454)