



## EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

**CORONAVIRUS, 26 March 2021**

### GREY LITERATURE

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#### **The impacts of COVID-19 on harm reduction service provision: a comparative analysis**

Vas, B; Win, C; Tevdoradze, L; Marques Rocha, R  
Central European University  
Budapest:

This report explores the extent to which the Coronavirus health emergency endangered adequate provision of the harm reduction services in three different policy and institutional settings of Georgia, Portugal, and the United States of America (USA), depicted through the thorough analysis of circumstances around harm reduction delivery in Pennsylvania. The selection of the three contexts is framed by the differences observed in the legislative status of narcotic substances and harm reduction in each country. Portugal's pioneering drug decriminalization process is often perceived as an example of good practices among scholars and health practitioners. Although drug policy in Georgia is still subject to critics and contentious points, the local provision of harm reduction programs evidences progressist practices while analyzing through the lenses of the current regional trends. Finally, example of the United States illustrates a scenario where national regulation poses a further challenge to the activity of organizations working to mitigate risks associated with the consumption of psychoactive substances.

[https://ghm.ge/img/file/APP-Report\\_GHRN.pdf](https://ghm.ge/img/file/APP-Report_GHRN.pdf)

#### **Working with domestic abuse, substance use and mental ill health**

Holly, J  
Community Care Inform  
London: 2021

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for social work, placing vulnerable children and adults at greater risk and exacerbating mental health problems. At Community Care Inform, we are doing all we can to ensure that our online resources provide maximum support to social work teams in our subscribing organisations.

Looking after the wellbeing of service users is always essential, but perhaps never more crucial than now. This is why we have made our guide to working with domestic abuse, substance use and mental ill health from our Adults' and Children's sites freely available to everyone. It's a comprehensive guide and is full of research, information and ideas to use in practice.

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/03/15/social-workers-can-work-domestic-abuse-substance-use-mental-ill-health/>

#### **Our other epidemic: addiction**

Frank, R G; Humphreys, K; Pollack, H  
JAMA Health Forum

[https://jamanetwork.com/channels/health-forum/fullarticle/2777969?utm\\_source=silverchair&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=article\\_alert-ihf&utm\\_content=olf&utm\\_term=032521](https://jamanetwork.com/channels/health-forum/fullarticle/2777969?utm_source=silverchair&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=article_alert-ihf&utm_content=olf&utm_term=032521)



### **Covid-19, impacts sur la santé mentale des personnes souffrant d'anxiété et de dépression**

Pellegrina, U ; Quaglino, V

Soins Psychiatrie

41, 331, p.29-33, 2020

La pandémie de Covid-19 et les mesures de protection sanitaire ont eu des répercussions sur la santé mentale de la population, en particulier pour les personnes déjà fragilisées par une maladie psychiatrique. Cette étude décrit l'impact psychologique de la crise sanitaire sur 85 patients souffrant essentiellement de troubles anxiodépressifs. Une analyse rétrospective révèle qu'une partie des patients ont ressenti une dégradation de leur humeur pendant le confinement.

Une recrudescence de troubles anxiodépressifs, de troubles du sommeil et de problématiques addictives a été observée. Des recommandations pourraient être envisagées pour ces patients dans le cas de nouvel épisode épidémique.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting health protection measures have had repercussions on the mental health of the population, particularly for people already made vulnerable by mental illness. This study describes the psychological impact of the health crisis on 85 patients suffering mainly from anxiety-depressive disorders. A retrospective analysis reveals that some patients felt their mood deteriorated during the lockdown. An increase in anxiety and depression, sleep disorders and addiction issues was observed. Recommendations could be envisaged for these patients in the event of a new epidemic episode.

### **Brief report: The impact of COVID-19 on emergency department overdose diagnoses and county overdose deaths**

Shreffler J, Shoff H, Thomas JJ, Huecker M.

American Journal of Addiction

19 March 2021

doi: 10.1111/ajad.13148

#### **Background and Objectives:**

We sought to understand the impact of COVID-19 on emergency department (ED) overdoses and county coroner verified overdose deaths.

#### **Methods:**

Electronic medical health record and county coroner data were gathered and comparisons were made between three 16-week time periods. In the three time periods, 873 individuals had an overdose diagnosis in the ED and 440 individuals in the county died of drug overdose.

#### **Results:**

While total ED patient volume decreased substantially, the number of ED overdose patients increased between March 6 and June 25, 2020. Furthermore, during this same period, coroner data revealed an increase in overdose deaths.

#### **Conclusion and Scientific Significance:**

This preliminary evidence provides a key insight into the impact of COVID-19 on both overdose presentations to the ED and county overdose deaths. These results emphasize the critical need for increasing vigilance to prevent overdose by continuously developing and optimizing both accessible and quality treatment as we navigate through this pandemic and its ongoing effects on persons with substance use disorder.

### **Shifts in drug seizures in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic**

Palamar, J J; Le, A; Carr, T H; Cottler, L B

Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2021, 108580

#### **Background:**

Little is known regarding how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected patterns of drug use in the United States. Because drug seizures can serve as a proxy for drug availability, we examined shifts in drug seizures in the US during the pandemic.

#### **Methods:**

We examined trends in seizures of marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl within five High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas-Washington/Baltimore, Chicago, Ohio, New Mexico, and North Florida. Trends were examined for number and total weight of seizures from March 2019 through September 2020 using Joinpoint regression.

#### **Results:**

Significant decreases in seizures involving marijuana ( $\beta = -0.03$ ,  $P = 0.005$ ) and methamphetamine ( $\beta = -0.02$ ,  $P = 0.026$ ) were detected through April 2020, and then seizures of marijuana ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $P = 0.028$ ) and methamphetamine ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $P = 0.010$ ) significantly increased through September 2020. The number of seizures involving marijuana and methamphetamine peaked in August 2020, exceeding the highest pre-COVID-19 number of seizures. Fentanyl seizures increased overall ( $\beta = 0.05$ ,  $P < .001$ ), but did not significantly drop during the start of COVID-19, and significant changes were not detected for cocaine or heroin. We also detected a significant increase in weight of marijuana seized from April through September 2020 ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $P = .001$ ). The weight of marijuana seized in August 2020 exceeded the highest pre-COVID-19 weight.

#### **Conclusion:**

The COVID-19 pandemic was associated with an immediate decrease in marijuana and methamphetamine seizures, and then increases throughout 2020 with some months exceeding the number (and weights) of seizures from the previous year. More research is warranted to determine the extent to which these seizures reflect changes in drug use.

#### **Upsurges in the joblessness and opioid epidemics in the U.S. after the COVID-19 epidemic: the plight of the jobless patient in the clinic**

Volinn, E; Loeser, J D

Pain

19 March 2021

DOI: 10.1097/j.pain.0000000000002253

#### **Impact of Covid-19 on drug use in Ireland**

Mongan, D

Drugnet Ireland: 76

Health Research Board

Dublin: 2021

<https://hrb.newsweaver.ie/drugnet/y48144874qi1k8wpmgt6mz?email=true&lang=en&a=2&p=58993721&t=29019333>

#### **Substitute addictions in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Sinclair, D L; Vanderplasschen, W; Savahl, S; et al

Journal of Behavioral Addictions

9, 4, p.1098-1102, 2021

The global spread of COVID-19, subsequent stay-at-home requirements, spatial distancing measures, and long-term isolation present additional challenges for persons in recovery. Using an illustrative case from South Africa, we discuss COVID-19 related pornography use through the lens of relapse and substitute addiction. South Africa is the epicenter of the pandemic in Africa, and has issued an alcohol and cigarette ban. Historical examples suggest that responses to forced abstinence may include compliance and abstinence, but also seeking alternatives to the original addiction and substitution. Substitution of alternative activities/objects may provide similar appetitive effects to fill the void of the terminated addictive behavior, temporarily or in the long-term. While substitutes do not necessarily portend a relapse, coupled with isolation and reduced recovery support, they can potentiate relapse to the former or 'new' addictive behavior. Addiction professionals should be aware of the potential for such negative impacts during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Rates and characteristics of SARS-CoV-2 infection in persons with hepatitis C virus infection**

Butt, AA; Yan, P

Liver International

41, 1, p.76-80, 2021

#### **Background:**

Rate of SARS-CoV-2 infection and impact of liver fibrosis stage upon infection rates in persons with hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection are unknown.

#### **Methods:**

We retrospectively analysed the Electronically Retrieved Cohort of HCV Infected Veterans (ERCHIVES), a well-established database of HCV-infected Veterans in care. We excluded those with missing FIB-4 score and those with HIV or hepatitis B virus co-infection. We determined the number of persons tested, proportion who tested positive for SARS-CoV-2 and the infection rate by age and liver fibrosis stage.

#### **Results:**

Among 172,235 persons with HCV, 14,305 (8.3%) were tested for SARS-CoV-2 infection and 892 (6.2%) tested positive. Those with SARS-CoV-2 infection were older, more likely to be Black (55.2%

vs 37.8%), obese (body mass index >30 kg/m<sup>2</sup> 36.2% vs 29.7%) and have diabetes or stroke (P < .0001 for all comparisons). Mean FIB-4 scores and proportion of persons with cirrhosis (based on a FIB-4 > 3.25) were similar in both groups. Incidence rate/1,000 tested persons was much higher among Blacks (88.4; 95% CI 81.1, 96.2) vs Whites (37.5; 95% CI 33.1, 42.4) but similar among those with cirrhosis (FIB-4 > 3.25). The rates were also similar among those who were untreated for HCV vs those treated with or without attaining a sustained virologic response.

#### **Conclusions:**

Testing rates among persons with HCV are very low. Persons with infection are more likely to be Black, have a higher body mass index and diabetes or stroke. The degree of liver fibrosis does not appear to have an impact on infection rate.

[https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/943618?src=WNL\\_clfoc\\_210322\\_MSCPEDIT\\_TEMP2&uac=154076EN&impID=3258616&faf=1](https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/943618?src=WNL_clfoc_210322_MSCPEDIT_TEMP2&uac=154076EN&impID=3258616&faf=1)

### **COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic: two public health emergencies that intersect with chronic pain**

Manchikanti, L; Vanaparthi, R; Atluri, S; et al

Pain and Therapy

23 March 2021

DOI: 10.1007/s40122-021-00243-2

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the entire world and catapulted the United States into one of the deepest recessions in history. While this pandemic rages, the opioid crisis worsens. During this period, the pandemic has resulted in the decimation of most conventional medical services, including those of chronic pain management, with the exception of virtual care and telehealth. Many chronic pain patients have been impacted in numerous ways, with increases in cardiovascular disease, mental health problems, cognitive dysfunction, and early death. The epidemic has also resulted in severe economic and physiological consequences for providers. Drug deaths in America, which fell for the first time in 25 years in 2018, rose to record numbers in 2019 and are continuing to climb, worsened by the coronavirus pandemic. The opioid epidemic was already resurfacing with a 5% increase in overall deaths from 2018; however, the preliminary data show that prescription opioid deaths continued to decline, while at the same time deaths due to fentanyl, methamphetamine, and cocaine climbed, with some reductions in heroin deaths. The health tracker data also showed that along with an almost 88% decline in elective surgeries, pain-related prescriptions declined 15.1%. Despite increases in telehealth, outpatient services declined and only began returning towards normal at an extremely slow pace, accompanied by reduced productivity and increased practice costs. This review, therefore, emphasizes the devastating consequences of concurrent epidemics on chronic pain management and the need to develop best practice efforts to preserve access to treatment for chronic pain.

### **The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on substance use and access to HIV prevention in Ukraine**

Dumchev, K; Kiriazova, T; Chernova, O; Kirtadze, I; Otiasgvili, D

Journal of the International AIDS Society 2021

24, SUPPL 1, p.103

#### **Background:**

The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Ukraine on March 3, and national lockdown was declared on March 11. It had a profound impact on the availability of illicit drugs, HIV prevention and drug treatment services. People who inject drugs (PWID) is a key population with highest HIV prevalence (23%) in Ukraine and reduction in access to prevention services may lead to a new wave of HIV transmission. This study is aiming to monitor the trends in drug use, risk behavior and prevention access in the context of COVID-19 pandemic and respective containment measures.

#### **Methods:**

This is an ongoing prospective cohort study of PWID, purposefully recruited from another large cohort. Bi-weekly interviews are conducted using an online questionnaire platform.

#### **Results:**

Fifty-one PWID were recruited on April 7 to 9; 29% are women, median age is 38. The use of illicit lab-manufactured methadone prior to March 2020 was reported 71% of participants, and decreased to 57% by the end of June. Instead, the use of methadone purchased by prescription increased more than three-fold, from 12% to 39%. Use of other drugs fluctuated (Figure 1). The proportion of PWID reporting harder access to drugs decreased from 39% in April, to 8% in July. Higher prices and poorer quality was reported by 18% and 29% at baseline, decreasing to 2% and 15% in June, respectively. The proportion experiencing harder than before access to HIV prevention decreased from 26% at

baseline to 6% in June. Nevertheless, the syringe sharing in the past 30 days increased from 8% to 13%.

**Conclusions:**

Overall, the availability of drugs and access to harm reduction are returning to pre-COVID era, whereas the shift from illegal to medical methadone is not. Our findings confirm the rapid and radical changes in the drug scene in Ukraine, with significant implications for HIV prevention programming.

**Evidencing the influence of pre-pandemic sports participation and substance misuse on physical activity during the COVID-19 lockdown: a prospective analysis among older adolescents**

Gilic, B, Zenic, N, Separovic, V, et al

International Journal of Occupational Medicine and Environmental Health, 2021, 22, 131737

**Objectives:**

The physical activity level (PAL) has significantly decreased as a result of the social distancing and lockdown related to the COVID-19 pandemic, but there is a lack of knowledge on the correlates of PAL during the pandemic. The aim of this research was to examine the influence of pre-pandemic sports participation and substance use and misuse (SUM) on PAL during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Material and methods:**

The study included 661 high-school students from Bosnia and Herzegovina (aged 15-18 years, 292 females). The investigation included 2 testing waves: before the COVID-19 pandemic (baseline, January 2020) and during the COVID-19 lockdown (follow-up, April 2020). The variables included PAL as measured by the *Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents*, sports factors, and SUM.

**Results:**

Sports factors at baseline were positively correlated with PALs at both baseline and follow-up. Smoking tobacco negatively affected PALs at both baseline and follow-up. Alcohol consumption was positively correlated with PAL at baseline but had no effect on PAL at follow-up.

**Conclusions:**

This study confirmed the importance of sports participation in maintaining PAL during challenging situations, such as the COVID-19 lockdown. The substance-specific influence of SUM on PAL before and during the lockdown points to evident social and cultural aspects of SUM behaviors in adolescents. Further studies evidencing the cumulative effects of PAL decline during the lockdown are warranted.

**Permanent methadone treatment reform needed to combat the opioid crisis and structural racism**

Peterkin A, Davis CS, Weinstein Z.

Journal of Addiction Medicine

19 March 2021

doi: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000841

Since early 2020 COVID-19 has swept across the United States, exposing shortcomings in the current healthcare delivery system. Although some interim efforts have been made to mitigate the spread of infection and maintain access to treatment for opioid use disorder, more permanent changes are needed to combat the ongoing opioid crisis. In this commentary, we describe the regulatory barriers to methadone maintenance treatment that disproportionately impact communities of color. We then discuss strategies supporting more equitable access to this proven treatment for opioid use disorder.

**The impact of stigma on treatment services for people with substance use disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic - perspectives of NECPAM members**

Dannatt, L; Grandinetti, P

Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2021, 12, 634515

**Increasing diversion of prescribed benzodiazepines and Z-drugs to new psychoactive substances**

Del Rio, A, Graziano, S, Tittarelli, R, Umani-Ronchi, F

Clinical Therapeutics

172, 2, p.116-118, 2021

Over the last few years reports have indicated an increase in the number, type and availability of new psychoactive substances belonging to the benzodiazepine class. These molecules may pose high risks to users, since the majority have never undergone clinical trials or tests so their pharmacology and toxicology is largely unknown. However the new drug scenario emerging from the COVID-19

global pandemic seems to play a role in increasing the diversion of prescribed benzodiazepines and Z-drug. A brief presentation of this phenomenon is hereby presented. The awareness and response activities at national and international levels related to this issue should be enforced.

**How well does online CBT stack up with CBT delivered in-person?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted ongoing barriers to alcohol use disorder treatment engagement, leading to widespread adoption of internet-delivered treatments and digital recovery support services.

<https://www.recoveryanswers.org/research-post/online-cbt-vs-in-person-cbt/>

**The spike in drug overdose deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic and policy options to move forward**

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2021/spike-drug-overdose-deaths-during-covid-19-pandemic-and-policy-options-move-forward>

**Bod to trial medicinal cannabis product as treatment for Long Covid**

[https://www.cannabiz.com.au/bod-to-trial-medicinal-cannabis-product-as-treatment-for-long-covid/?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Cannabiz%20newsletter%2025321&utm\\_content=Cannabiz%20newsletter%2025321+CID\\_160a0e870f8385c0c2c44dd427c4300c&utm\\_source=CampaignMonitor&utm\\_term=Bod%20to%20trial%20medicinal%20cannabis%20product%20as%20treatment%20for%20Long%20Covid](https://www.cannabiz.com.au/bod-to-trial-medicinal-cannabis-product-as-treatment-for-long-covid/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Cannabiz%20newsletter%2025321&utm_content=Cannabiz%20newsletter%2025321+CID_160a0e870f8385c0c2c44dd427c4300c&utm_source=CampaignMonitor&utm_term=Bod%20to%20trial%20medicinal%20cannabis%20product%20as%20treatment%20for%20Long%20Covid)

**How COVID has worsened the opioid epidemic**

There is another epidemic we cannot lose sight of: the opioid epidemic, which has become only more acute in the United States and elsewhere amidst the disruptions and stress caused by COVID-19. We asked Yale SOM's Marissa King, who researches opioid use and prescription abuse as well as the functions of social networks, how we should be thinking about these dual healthcare crises.

<https://insights.som.yale.edu/insights/how-covid-has-worsened-the-opioid-epidemic>

**Parents of students in hybrid learning more likely to report increased substance use**

[https://drugfree.org/drug-and-alcohol-news/parents-of-students-in-hybrid-learning-more-likely-to-report-increased-substance-use/?utm\\_source=pns&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=parents-of-students-in-hybrid-learning-more-likely-to-report-increased-substance-use](https://drugfree.org/drug-and-alcohol-news/parents-of-students-in-hybrid-learning-more-likely-to-report-increased-substance-use/?utm_source=pns&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=parents-of-students-in-hybrid-learning-more-likely-to-report-increased-substance-use)

**How social workers can work with domestic abuse, substance use and mental ill health**

Community Care Inform's guide to working with domestic abuse, substance use and mental ill health is now available as a free download to support all practitioners | Community Care, UK

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2021/03/15/social-workers-can-work-domestic-abuse-substance-use-mental-ill-health/>