



EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

CORONAVIRUS, 25 June 2021

EVENT

Drug and behavioural addictions: COVID-19 and beyond

Wed, 7 July 2021, 08:55 – 13:30 BST.

There is an immediate need to pool an understanding of how the pandemic has impacted alcohol intake, drug use, and behavioural addictions. Collating this knowledge can help doctors and mental health professionals improve patient care by being aware of what's happening during the pandemic and being prepared for potential mental health changes in their clients.

The Sussex Addiction Research and Intervention Centre (SARIC), which is hosting this knowledge exchange event, hopes to bring people together to (a) discuss how COVID-19 has impacted addiction-related mental health issues and (b) stimulate action to help prevent and treat potential addictions.

Through seminars and discussion, this symposium will explore the impact of COVID-19 on various forms of addiction and their treatment.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/drug-and-behavioural-addictions-covid-19-and-beyond-tickets-157794209729>

The impact of COVID-19 on drug usage

Diacono, S; Caruana, R; Vella, A M

Aġenzija Sedqa

Malta: 2021

<https://yourfutureu.ksu.org.mt/.../2021/06/KSU-Article-2.pdf>

The impact of COVID-19 on child criminal exploitation – interim research briefing

University of Nottingham Rights Lab

Nottingham: 2020

Initial findings of an ongoing research project indicate that restrictions introduced in response to COVID-19 have forced adaptations in the methods used by County Lines drug supply networks and have impacted upon the ways in which frontline professionals work to detect and effectively safeguard children and young people.

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/research/beacons-of-excellence/rights-lab/resources/reports-and-briefings/2020/november/briefing-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-child-criminal-exploitation.pdf>

Covid-19, vulnerability and the safeguarding of criminally exploited children

University of Nottingham Rights Lab

Nottingham: 2021

As the UK transitions out of lockdown and Covid-19 restrictions are lifted, ongoing concerns include:

Reduced identification of exploitation – Diminished face-to-face contact between youth workers and children continues to challenge professionals' ability to identify signs of exploitation. While remote engagement has remained high, there is concern that many children remain in dangerous and exploitative situations both within and away from their homes.

Online exploitation and grooming – As young people continue to spend more time online and on social media platforms, there is an increased risk of online grooming for both criminal and sexual exploitation.

Vulnerability – The overall level of County Lines activity was mostly unchanged during the pandemic, and the widespread exploitation of children persisted. Mental health has deteriorated among already vulnerable children and there are indications that substance misuse and self-harm are on the rise.

<https://dmscdn.vuelio.co.uk/publicitem/33f37de1-da45-464f-8a28-d6091ef91dd8>

Modelling projections for opioid-related deaths during the COVID-19 outbreak

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

Ottawa: 2021

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) released new modelling projections of the number of opioid-related deaths that may occur over the course of the coming months. The results of the model suggest that, under some scenarios, the number of opioid-related deaths may remain high or may even increase through to December 31, 2021.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2021/06/modelling-projections-for-opioid-related-deaths-during-the-covid-19-outbreak.html>

Opioid- and stimulant-related harms in Canada

Government of Canada

Ottawa: 2021

The COVID-19 outbreak is worsening the already deadly and on-going public health crisis of opioid overdoses and death. It is having a tragic impact on people who use substances, their families, and communities across Canada. People who use substances, such as opioids, cocaine, and methamphetamine, are experiencing a number of increased risks, with several jurisdictions reporting higher rates of fatal overdoses and other harms.

This update includes data on deaths, hospitalizations and Emergency Medical Services responses involving opioids and/or stimulants between January 2016 and December 2020, where available. Recognizing that harms related to opioids, stimulants, and other substances extend beyond overdoses (poisonings) and deaths, we continue to work with federal, provincial and territorial partners to build a broad understanding of harms and substances involved to better respond to the crisis. Additional studies can also help us plan and tailor actions to achieve better possible outcomes.

<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>

2021 World Drug Report: Booklet 5 - COVID-19 and drugs: Impact and outlook

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

Vienna: 2021

Constituting the fifth part of the World Drug Report 2021, this booklet contains an early assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on drug markets, as the situation continues to evolve and more data become available. The aim is to paint a comprehensive picture of the measurable effects and potential impact of the COVID-19 crisis to assist Member States in anticipating and addressing challenges that may arise in the near future.

The booklet contains an analysis of how the pandemic has affected drug production, manufacture and trafficking, according to region and drug type. This is followed by an analysis of the most recent trends and patterns in drug trafficking and the distribution of drugs at the retail level, including on the clear web and the dark web. The booklet also contains an analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to contain it have affected drug use and patterns of drug use, possible health consequences for drug users and how the provision of treatment and services to people who use drugs has been affected; a number of innovations in this area, which stem from the reaction to the pandemic, are described. The booklet concludes with an overview of the potential for long-term changes to drug markets as a result of the pandemic.

https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_5.pdf

De COVID-19-crisis en verslaving bij jongeren

[The COVID-19 crisis and addiction in young people]

de Veth-Konings, M

Tijdschrift voor Psychiatrie

63, 5, p.331-332, 2021

Apprentissage de l'élargissement des modalités de prescription de l'héroïne médicale avec le Covid-19

[Learning to expand medical heroin prescribing modalities with Covid-19]

Calzada, G; Zullino, D

Revue Medicale Suisse

17, 742, p.1111-1114, 2021

L'offre des traitements assistés par opioïdes pour les personnes avec dépendance à l'héroïne est particulièrement diversifiée en Suisse. Les traitements basés sur la prescription de diacétylmorphine y sont ainsi proposés depuis 1994, dont les règles de prescription et de remise au patient régies par l'Office fédéral de la santé publique sont particulièrement strictes, imposant aux patients un passage au centre de soins plusieurs fois par jour. Grâce aux modifications législatives du Conseil fédéral, permettant aux patients d'emporter le traitement pour des durées plus longues pendant la pandémie de Covid-19, les passages à la consultation ont été réduits. Cela a eu pour effet indirect de libérer du temps, qui a pu être investi dans d'autres activités, notamment le recentrage des thérapies davantage autour des projets de vie des patients.

The choice of opioid-assisted treatments for patients with heroin dependence is particularly diverse in Switzerland. Since 1994, diacetylmorphine assisted treatments are available. The rules for prescribing and dispensing diacetylmorphine, as laid down by the FOPH, are particularly strict, requiring patients to attend the treatment center several times a day. Thanks to a legislative amendment by the Federal Council, it became possible to extend the dispensing of diacetylmorphine during the Covid-19 epidemic, allowing patients to take the treatment with them for longer periods and thus reducing the number of visits to the clinic. The time freed up could then be invested in other activities, allowing therapies to be refocused more on the patients' life project.

Harnessing the power of social media to understand the impact of COVID-19 on people who use drugs during lockdown and social distancing.

El-Bassel N, Hochstatter KR, Slavin MN, Yang C, Zhang Y, Muresan S.

Journal of Addiction Medicine

17 June 2021

doi: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000883

Objectives:

This paper uses a social media platform, Reddit, to identify real-time experiences of people who use drugs during the COVID-19 lock-down.

Methods:

Reddit is a popular and growing social media platform, providing a large, publicly available dataset necessary for high performance of machine learning and topic modeling techniques. We used opioid-related "subreddits," communities where Reddit users engage in conversations about drug use, to examine COVID-19-related content of posts and comments from March to May 2020. This paper investigates the latent topics of users' posts/comments using Latent Dirichlet Allocation, an unsupervised machine learning approach that uncovers the thematic structure of a document collection. We also examine how topics changed over time.

Results:

The final dataset consists of 525 posts and 9284 comments, for a total of 9809 posts/comments (3756 posts/comments in r/opiates, 1641 in r/OpiatesRecovery, 1203 in r/suboxone, and 3209 in r/Methadone) among 2342 unique individuals. There were 5256 posts/comments in March; 3185 in April; and 1368 in May (until May 22). Topics that appeared most frequently in COVID-19-related discussions included medication for opioid use disorder experiences and access issues (22.6%), recovery (24.2%), and drug withdrawal (20.2%).

Conclusions:

During the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, people who use drugs were impacted in several ways, including forced or intentional withdrawal, confusion between withdrawal and COVID-19 symptoms, take-home medication for opioid use disorder issues, and barriers to recovery. As the

pandemic progresses, providers and policymakers should consider these experiences among people who use drugs during the early stage of the pandemic.

Acceptability and feasibility of using digital technology to train community practitioners to deliver a family-based intervention for adolescents with drug use disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic

Busse, A, Kashino, W, Suhartono, S, et al
Addictive Behaviors Reports, 2021, 14, 100357

Introduction:

By adhering to government preventative messages to stay-at-home and social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic, training practitioners in person in implementing a family-based intervention (i.e., Treatnet Family) is not possible. The present study examined the feasibility and acceptability of using digital technology to remotely deliver Treatnet Family training to practitioners in community counselling services in Indonesia.

Method:

Fifteen practitioners, from the association of addiction counsellors in Indonesia, participated in the Treatnet Family workshop remotely. The training was delivered by four national Treatnet Family trainers remotely via a digital platform for five days with additional take-home assignments.

Results:

All practitioners reported that Treatnet Family training have enhanced their skills in working with adolescents and their family. Most practitioners reported having confidence in conducting Treatnet Family and in applying core skills of family-based intervention. Participating in the workshop enabled practitioners to learn the core skills of the Treatnet Family at their own pace. However, some practitioners also stated few disadvantages in remote training, including having limited time for the discussion and feeling overwhelmed with the assignments. Some find it hard to attend such training from their home due to distractions.

Conclusion:

Digital technology is acceptable and feasible method for training community practitioners to deliver Treatnet Family to adolescents with SUDs and their families in Indonesia. These findings can inform the way to use digital technology to deliver core family-based skills to community practitioners in other low-resource settings.

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

Treitler, P C; Bowden, C F; 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.

Is substance use changing because of the COVID-19 pandemic? Conceptual and methodological considerations to delineating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on substance use and disorder

Jager, J; Keyes, K M

116, 6, p.1301-1303, 2021

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

17 June 2021

DOI: 10.1037/adb0000748

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.

Access to harm reduction treatment among formerly incarcerated individuals during the COVID-19 era

Rowell-Cunsolo, T L; Hart C

Health Security

21 June 2021

DOI: 10.1089/hs.2021.0037

Decrease in prevalence but increase in frequency of non-marijuana drug use following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in a large cohort of young men who have sex with men and young transgender women

Janulis, P; Newcomb, M E; Mustanski, B

Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2021, 223, 108701

Background:

Substantial concern exists regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on substance use behaviors. This is especially true for subpopulations like young men who have sex with men and young transgender women (YMSM-YTW) who report higher rates of substance use. This study examines changes in prevalence and frequency of marijuana and non-marijuana drug use among YMSM-YTW following the onset of the pandemic.

Method:

Data for this analysis ($n = 458$ participants, 1356 observations) come from an ongoing longitudinal cohort study of YMSM-YTW. A series of Bayesian multilevel models were used to examine change in prevalence and frequency of use for marijuana and non-marijuana drugs.

Results:

Results indicated no systematic change in prevalence or frequency of marijuana use. However, a decrease in non-marijuana drug use was observed (OR = 0.60, 95 % CrI: [0.37, 0.94]) following the onset of the pandemic. Furthermore, a small increase in the frequency of non-marijuana drug use was observed (OR = 1.79, 95 % CrI: [1.02, 3.21]) among individuals who used these substances.

Conclusions:

These findings concur with a small number of studies identifying a decrease in drug use prevalence but increase in frequency among those who continue to use drugs. Despite the protective effect of lower drug use prevalence, higher frequency of use may lead to additional negative health outcomes of drug use, particularly among groups facing multiple health challenges such as YMSM-YTW. However, the pandemic likely has a unique impact on substance use behaviors across subpopulations.

Identifying the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on service access for people who use drugs (PWUD): A national qualitative study

Russell, C; Ali, F; Nafeh, F; et al

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 129, 108374

Introduction:

Closures and reductions in capacity of select health and social services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic may have placed people who use drugs (PWUD) at a disproportionately increased risk for experiencing harms, and resulted in critical treatment disruptions. We conducted the current national study among a cohort of PWUD to understand how COVID-19 has affected service access, including any significant impacts PWUD may have experienced. Results will contribute to the evidence base for informing future pandemic and public health policy planning for vulnerable populations.

Methods:

The project involved qualitative telephone-based interviews with 196 adult (aged 18+) PWUD from across Canada. Eligibility criteria included daily or weekly use of psychoactive substance(s), and/or current enrollment in opioid agonist treatment (OAT). Data collection took place between May and July 2020. Data underwent thematic analyses, and common themes informed the results.

Results:

Most participants experienced detrimental service access issues and treatment disruptions during COVID-19, including reduced access to harm reduction services, OAT, withdrawal management and treatment services, medical professionals (e.g., addictions and mental health counseling), shelters/housing, and food banks. Positive impacts included greater access to OAT take-home 'carries' and prescription deliveries. Decreases in service capacity resulted in increased health issues and risky substance use behaviors among PWUD, such as unaccompanied substance use, sharing/re-use of supplies, and overdose events.

Conclusions:

Reductions in the accessibility of critical services PWUD rely on during COVID-19 has increased existent substance use and health issues among PWUD, while decreasing their ability to mitigate risks related to substance use. Thus, the expansion of the depth and breadth of support options is crucial. Services must remain open and flexible to the unique needs of PWUD during COVID-19, while novel and effective adaptations and interventions should remain available and accessible post-COVID-19.

Recovering from substance use disorders during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic: A mixed-methods longitudinal study of women in Kansas City

Hurley, E A; Pina, K; Cegielski, V; et al

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 129, 108378

Aims:

During the early months of the U.S. COVID-19 outbreak, women suffered disproportionate burdens of pandemic-related psychological and economic distress. We aimed to describe the experiences of women in substance use disorder (SUD) recovery programs by (1) exploring the pandemic's impact on their lives, sobriety, and recovery capital and (2) tracking COVID-19 perceptions and preventative behaviors.

Methods:

We conducted monthly semistructured interviews with women in residential and outpatient SUD recovery programs in Kansas City in April, May, and June 2020. Participants described the pandemic's impact on their life and sobriety and completed survey items on factors related to COVID-19 preventative behaviors. We interpreted qualitative themes longitudinally alongside quantitative data.

Results:

In 64 interviews, participants (n = 24) described reduced access to recovery capital, or resources that support sobriety, such as social relationships, housing, employment, and health care. Most experienced negative impacts on their lives and feelings of stability in March and April but maintained sobriety. Four women described relapse, all attributed to pandemic stressors. Participants described relief related to societal re-opening in May and June, and increased engagement with their communities, despite rising infection rates.

Conclusions:

For women recovering from SUDs during COVID-19, securing recovery capital often meant assuming greater COVID-19 risk. As substance use appeared to have increased during the pandemic and COVID-19 transmission continues, public health planning must prioritize adequate and safe access to recovery capital and timely distribution of vaccines to people struggling with SUDs.

Maintaining treatment and prevention programs for opioid use disorders during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

Li, R; Zhao, M

Current Opinion in Psychiatry

34, 4, p.369-375, 2021

Purpose of Review:

The current article reviews the impact of the biggest health crisis for many decades, coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), on opioid treatment programs and the strategies adopted for maintaining opioid treatment programs during the pandemic.

Recent Findings:

The difficulty of access to opioid treatment services and the mental health problems accompanying opioid use disorders are the two main challenges to maintaining accessible and effective opioid treatment. Many countries and institutions issued guidance and recommendations to address these challenges. General coping strategies, loosening of policies, telemedicine, and depot buprenorphine are four main strategies to cope with the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Summary:

There were considerable obstacles to maintaining opioid intervention programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Strategies addressing the obstacles are identified. Research in this area needs to be strengthened.

Converging public health crises: substance use during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic

Striley, C W; Loefflich, C C

Current Opinion in Psychiatry

34, 4, p.325-331, 2021

Purpose of Review:

The international, public health crisis caused by the rapid spread of SARS-CoV-2 has resulted in unforeseen medical and psychiatric consequences. We reviewed publications from January 2020 to January 2021, given that earlier documents were not relevant, to review findings on changes in substance use and overdoses during the pandemic. Additionally, this review of the literature also documents advocacy efforts, health service modification and challenges, as well as COVID-related health complications associated with substance use.

Recent Findings:

Recent work focused on identifying changes in the distribution and use of substances as well as the unique challenges to promoting the health of persons who use substances in the current pandemic. Although COVID-19 has triggered unprecedented innovations in the organizational and public policy, the use of certain substances (alcohol, cannabis, cigarettes, fentanyl, heroin, and opiates) is increasing internationally. Unique associations between substance use and pandemic-related adverse health outcomes were identified. In addition, the pandemic precipitated significant barriers and disruptions to care.

Summary:

Given increased overdose rates and infections among people who use drugs, continued surveillance and vigilance are needed to assess changes and reduce use and adverse consequences during the continuing COVID-19 crisis. Changes are urgently needed to reduce adverse health outcomes because of treatment barriers and lack of adequate treatment options. Additionally, integrative approaches are necessary to promote the public health of persons who use substances.

Opioids in the United Kingdom: safety and surveillance during COVID-19

Osborne, V

Current Opinion in Psychiatry

34, 4, p.355-362, 2021

Purpose of Review:

Opioid use is prevalent in the United Kingdom and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic it had been recognized that the safety of opioids was an important issue to be monitored by the UK medicines regulatory agency. With the emergence of COVID-19, this requirement has been even greater. This

review was undertaken to determine the impact of the pandemic on safety and surveillance of opioids in the United Kingdom.

Recent Findings:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the surveillance of opioids in the United Kingdom continued, although primary research was often conducted with data prior to the pandemic. Of those studies that were conducted while the pandemic was ongoing, access to opioids (or opioid substitution therapy) and the subsequent effect on patient safety was the main theme.

Summary:

In the United Kingdom, changes in accessibility to the healthcare system and how healthcare providers operated during the COVID-19 pandemic may have had unintended consequences on use and safety of opioids, due to the shift in focus to preventing COVID-19 from overwhelming the healthcare system. The findings from this review support the need to continue surveillance in the United Kingdom, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on opioid utilization and safety.

Differences in coronavirus disease 2019 screening, diagnosis, and hospitalization rates among U.S. pregnant women with and without a substance use disorder

Gao, Y A; Jarlenski, J P; Chen, Q; Krans, E E

American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, 23 June 2021 - DOI: 10.1016/j.ajog.2021.06.004

Objective:

Pregnant women are at increased risk for severe morbidity and mortality due to respiratory infections like SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) during pregnancy¹. Those with substance use disorders (SUD) may be especially vulnerable due to high rates of smoked tobacco, cannabis and methamphetamine use which adversely affect pulmonary function.² However, little is known about differential effects of COVID-19 on pregnant women with and without SUD.

Study Design:

This was a retrospective cohort study of commercially insured pregnant women ages 15-44 using national administrative healthcare data from Optum's deidentified Clinformatics® Data Mart Database version 8.1 (2007-2020). Women with a delivery hospitalization between January 1, 2020-August 19, 2020 continuously enrolled in insurance for ≥8 weeks during pregnancy and 6 weeks postpartum were included. SUD was defined using ICD-10 diagnoses for ≥ 1 SUD during pregnancy including alcohol, amphetamine, cannabis, cocaine, opioid or other substance use disorder.³ COVID-19 screening and diagnosis were defined using ICD-10 coding and reporting guidelines published by the CDC.^{4, 5} We used T-tests, Fisher's exact tests, and quantile regression (percentiles) to examine statistical differences. This study was exempt by the University of Pittsburgh IRB because deidentified healthcare data were used.

Results:

Among 65,009 pregnancies, 2,616 (4.0%) had ≥1 SUD diagnosis. Almost half of the pregnant women in the cohort were non-Hispanic White (48%) and most lived in the South (41%) or the Midwest (28%) region of the United States (Table). Pregnant women with an SUD diagnosis were significantly more likely to be younger (30±6 vs 32±5; p<.05). Compared with the overall sample, non-Hispanic Black (10% vs 7%; p, .05) and non-Hispanic White (54% vs 48%; p<.05) women were overrepresented among those with SUD as opposed to Hispanic and non-Hispanic Asian women. Overall, 27% of pregnant women were screened and evaluated for COVID-19 during pregnancy or postpartum. Women without an SUD diagnosis were significantly more likely to be screened for COVID-19 during pregnancy (27% vs 24%; p<0.001) than those with an SUD. Overall, 3.4% of pregnant women were diagnosed with COVID-19, mostly (86%) in the third trimester. The prevalence of a COVID-19 diagnosis was higher among those with a SUD compared to those without an SUD (5% vs 3%; p<0.05). Further, there was a higher percentage of COVID-19 related hospitalizations among pregnant women with an SUD (36%) than those without an SUD (8%) (p<0.001). The median length of stay was one day longer among those with a SUD (3 vs 2 days; p<0.01) compared to those without an SUD. There were no COVID-19 related deaths reported during pregnancy or postpartum.

Conclusion:

In this national cohort, pregnant women with a SUD had a higher COVID-19 diagnosis rate than those without a SUD, despite lower screening rates. Among those with a COVID-19 diagnosis, pregnant women with a SUD had a significantly higher rate of COVID-19 related hospitalizations and longer median length of stay than those without a SUD. Efforts to improve COVID-19 screening rates and decrease morbidity associated with COVID-19 diagnosis among pregnant women with SUDs may be warranted.

Changes in illicit drug use and markets with the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions: Findings from the Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System, 2016-2020

Price, O, Man, N, Bruno, R, et al

Addiction

Aims:

To describe i) self-reported changes in drug use and ii) trends in price, perceived availability, and perceived purity of illicit drugs, among people who regularly use ecstasy/MDMA and other illicit stimulants in Australia following COVID-19 and associated restrictions.

Design:

Annual interviews with cross-sectional sentinel samples conducted face-to-face in 2016-2019, and via video conferencing or phone in 2020. Data were collected via an interviewer-administered structured questionnaire.

Setting:

Australian capital cities.

Participants:

Australians aged 16 years or older who used ecstasy/MDMA and other illicit stimulants on a monthly or more frequent basis and resided in a capital city, recruited via social media and word-of-mouth (n~800 each year).

Measurements:

Key outcome measures were self-reported illicit drug market indicators (price, purity and availability) and, in 2020 only, perceived change in drug use (including alcohol and tobacco) since March 2020 and reasons for this change.

Findings:

For most drugs, participants reported either no change or a reduction in their use since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced. Ecstasy/MDMA was the drug most frequently cited as reduced in use (n=552, 70% of those reporting recent use), mostly due to reduced opportunities for socialisation. While market indicators were largely stable across most drugs, the odds of perceiving MDMA capsules as 'high' in purity decreased compared with 2016-2019 (adjusted odds ratio [AOR] 0.72, 95% confidence interval [CI95]: 0.53-0.99), as did perceiving them as 'easy' to obtain (AOR 0.42, CI95: 0.26-0.67). The odds of perceiving cocaine and methamphetamine crystal as 'easy' to obtain also decreased (AOR 0.67, CI95: 0.46-0.96 and AOR 0.12, CI95: 0.04-0.41, respectively).

Conclusions:

After COVID-19-related restrictions were introduced in Australia, use of ecstasy/MDMA, related stimulants, and other licit and illicit drugs mostly appeared to remain stable or decrease, primarily due to impediments to socialisation.

Adolescent drug use before and during U.S. national COVID-19 social distancing policies

Miech, R; Patrick, M E; Keyes, K; et al
Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 2021, 108822

Background

How adolescent substance use and perceived availability of substances have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic remain largely unknown. Substantial reduction in availability of substances would present a unique opportunity to consider the supply-side hypothesis that reductions in drug availability will lead to reductions in drug prevalence.

Methods

Longitudinal data come from Monitoring the Future and are based on responses from 582 adolescents who were originally surveyed as part of a national sample of 12th grade students in early 2020, one month before social distancing policies began. They were surveyed again after social distancing policies were implemented, in the summer of 2020.

Results

Perceived availability of marijuana and alcohol declined across the two survey waves at the largest levels ever recorded in the 46 years of the project, by an absolute 17%, $p < .01$ and 24%, $p < .01$, respectively. Despite these declines, prevalence levels did not significantly change across the two waves for marijuana use in the past 30 days or for binge drinking in the past two weeks. Perceived availability of vaping devices significantly declined, from 73% to 63%, as did nicotine vaping prevalence in the past 30 days, from 24% to 17%.

Conclusions

Perceived availability of marijuana, alcohol, and vaping devices declined at historic rates during the pandemic of 2020. Lack of accompanying reductions in prevalence for marijuana and binge drinking demonstrates the substantial challenges facing a supply-side approach to the reduction of adolescent use of these substances.

Adaptations to substance use disorder monitoring by physician health programs in response to COVID-19

Polles, A; Merlo, L J

Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2021, 125, 108281

Rise in violence and sexual exploitation against children and young people 'linked to County Lines'

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/news/rise-violence-and-sexual-exploitation-children-young-people-county-lines>

Cases of COVID-19 induced drug abuse rise in Africa

<https://www.fairplanet.org/story/cases-of-covid-19-induced-drug-abuse-rise-in-africa/>

Mental health, substance use, and family distress: COVID-19's penumbra

<https://www.jdsupra.com/legalnews/mental-health-substance-use-and-family-5306049/>

Drug traffickers change tactics to avoid COVID-19 travel curbs

<https://newsnationusa.com/news/business/drug-traffickers-change-tactics-to-avoid-covid-19-travel-curbs/>

The epidemic after a pandemic: How COVID-19 impacted substance use issues

<https://kutv.com/news/addicted-utah/how-covid-19-impacted-substance-use-issues>

Beware, drug use worsens during COVID-19 pandemic

<https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2021/06/21/beware-drug-use-worsens-during-covid-19-pandemic.html>

'Immense challenge': Trying to save the lives of B.C. drug users, hit hard by COVID-19 and the overdose crisis

<https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/detox-roadblocks>

We must address the overdose crisis with the same focus as COVID-19

https://filtermag.org/overdose-covid-19-medications/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=filter

Data from PA: opioid overdoses escalated during COVID lockdown

<https://dailynurse.com/data-from-pa-opioid-overdoses-escalated-during-covid-lockdown/>

Adolescent marijuana and alcohol use did not significantly change during the pandemic

Adolescent marijuana use and binge drinking did not significantly change during the COVID-19 pandemic, despite record decreases in the substances' perceived availability, according to a survey of 12th graders in the United States | News Medical, USA

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20210624/Adolescent-marijuana-and-alcohol-use-did-not-significantly-change-during-the-pandemic.aspx>

COVID pandemic fuelling major increase in drug use worldwide: UN report

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1094672>

COVID-19 restrictions may have accelerated drug trafficking via Internet: Report

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/covid-19-restrictions-may-have-accelerated-drug-trafficking-via-internet-report/article34954894.ece>

Covid-19 lockdown sees 'significant drop' in crime but drug-driving offences soar

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns has seen "a significant drop" in the number of criminal offences recorded by An Garda Síochána.

<https://www.policeprofessional.com/news/covid-19-lockdown-sees-significant-drop-in-crime-but-drug-driving-offences-soar/>