



EMCDDA DOCUMENTATION CENTRE INFORMATION BULLETIN

CORONAVIRUS, 18 December 2020

GREY LITERATURE

Lockdown and beyond: A COVID insights report

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD)
Glasgow: 2020

This report tells our shared COVID story through the form of open letters from families and team members, statistical reports from our Helpline and other services, and information on our COVID response throughout the pandemic.

<https://www.sfad.org.uk/content/uploads/2020/12/COVID-Insights-Report-December-2020.pdf>

COVID-19: guidance for commissioners and providers of services for people who use drugs or alcohol

Updated to reflect recommendations for best practice for drug and alcohol services in the current stage of the pandemic | PHE, UK

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-services-for-people-who-use-drugs-or-alcohol?utm_source=ff40c3d3-0a47-4e83-95e4-09a86483043b&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on prevention, testing, diagnosis and care for sexually transmitted infections, HIV and viral hepatitis in England: provisional data – January-September 2020

Public Health England
London: 2020

Report assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on prevention, testing, diagnosis and care for STIs, HIV and hepatitis in England.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943657/Impact_of_COVID-19_Report_2020.pdf

Opioid- and stimulant-related harms in Canada

Government of Canada
Toronto: 2020

The COVID-19 outbreak is worsening the already deadly and ongoing 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 available data on deaths, hospitalizations and Emergency Medical Services responses involving opioids and/or stimulants between January 2016 and June 2020, where available. Recognizing that harms related to opioids, stimulants, and other substances extend beyond overdoses (poisonings) and deaths, we continue to work with the provinces and territories to build a broad understanding of harms and substances involved to better respond to the crisis.

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

A supplemental report on British Columbia’s unregulated drug supply amidst dual public health emergencies: results from British Columbia’s Community Drug Checking Service, January 2020 – October 2020

Long, V, Tobias, S, Lysyshyn, M, et al
British Columbia Centre on Substance Use
Vancouver: 2020

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the trends and related information in British Columbia’s (BC) unregulated drug supply in the context of dual public health emergencies — the ongoing overdose crisis and the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This report is a supplement to another report titled, “A report on British Columbia’s Unregulated Drug Supply: Results from British Columbia’s Community Drug Checking Service, June 2018 – December 2019.” The present report highlights key findings from a snapshot of point-of-care drug checking results operating in select supervised consumption sites (SCS), overdose prevention sites (OPS), and other health authority sanctioned sites in BC from January 2020 to October 2020. The point-of-care results presented in this report are collected from drug checking services that use Fourier-transform infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy, fentanyl test strips, and benzodiazepine test strips, and do not include results from drug checking services that use other technologies. The report presents trends in drug checking utilization, expected drugs checked, benzodiazepine adulteration in expected opioid samples and non-opioid drug samples, and cuts and buffs in expected opioid samples. Herein, non-opioid drug samples refer to expected stimulants, psychedelics, depressants, and unknown samples.

https://drugcheckingbc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/12/BCCSU_BCs_DC_Supplemental_Report.pdf

Essential work, precarious labour: The need for safer and equitable harm reduction work in the era of COVID-19

Olding, M; Barker, A; McNeil, R; et al
International Journal of Drug Policy, 2021, 90, 103076

This commentary highlights labour concerns and inequities within the harm reduction sector that hinder programs' ability to respond to converging public health emergencies (the overdose crisis and COVID-19), and potentially contribute to spread of the novel coronavirus. Many harm reduction programs continue to support people who use illicit drugs (PWUD) during the pandemic, yet PWUD working in harm reduction programs (sometimes termed 'peers') experience precarious labour conditions characterized by low wages, minimal employee benefits (such as paid sick leave) and high employment insecurity. Along with precarious labour conditions, PWUD face heightened vulnerabilities to COVID-19 and yet have been largely overlooked in global response to the pandemic. Operating under conditions of economic and legal precarity, harm reduction programs' reliance on precarious labour (e.g. on-call, temporary and unpaid work) renders some services vulnerable to staffing shortages and service disruptions during the pandemic, while also heightening the risk of virus transmission among workers, service users and their communities. We call for immediate policy and programmatic actions to strengthen working conditions within these settings with a priority on enhancing protections and supports for workers in peer roles.

Addictive behaviors and craving during the COVID-19 pandemic of people who have recovered from substance use disorder

Bonny-Noach H, Gold D.
Journal of Addictive Diseases
11 December 2020
DOI: 10.1080/10550887.2020.1856298

Stressors caused by the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) contribute to increased addictive behaviors in the general population worldwide. Little is known, however, about addictive behaviors of people who have recovered a long time ago, even years, from substance use disorder (SUD). The goal of the present research was to examine the craving for drug use and addictive behaviors (tobacco and alcohol consumption, viewing of pornography, gambling, and shopping online) of people who recovered from SUD, before and after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods:

During one week of isolation imposed in Israel following the outbreak of COVID-19 in April, 2020, a self-report questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample of 113 people who had recovered from SUD, aged 22-69, 78% men.

Results

Fifty-one percent of participants reported craving drugs during the isolation period and engaging in addictive behaviors. Significant differences were found in tobacco and alcohol consumption, gambling, and viewing of pornography online, before and after the outbreak of the pandemic, especially in participants who reported having engaged in these addictive behaviors to some extent before the outbreak. A hierarchical linear regression showed a significant explained variance ($R^2=44\%$, $p<.001$), with stronger feelings of loneliness and shorter length of time free from drug use being associated with stronger craving for drugs.

Conclusions:

The drug addiction treatment establishment should pay close attention and strengthen communication with people who recovered from SUD. It is necessary to develop real-time anti-craving and anti-replacement addiction interventions to prevent relapses.

Leveraging digital tools to support recovery from substance use disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic response

McDonnell, A; MacNeill, C; Chapman, B; et al
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2020, 108226

Treatment for substance use disorder (SUD) during the COVID-19 pandemic poses unique challenges, both due to direct effects from the illness, and indirect effects from the physical measures needed to "flatten the curve." Stress, isolation, lack of structure, limited access to physical and mental health care, and changes in treatment paradigms all increase risk of return to drug use events and pose barriers to recovery for people with SUDs. The pandemic has forced treatment providers and facilities to rapidly adapt to address these threats while redesigning their structure to accommodate

physical distancing regulations. Digital health interventions can function without the need for physical proximity. Clinicians can use digital health intervention, such as telehealth, wearables, mobile applications, and other remote monitoring devices, to convert in-person care to remote-based care, and they can leverage these tools to address some of the pandemic-specific challenges to treatment. The current pandemic provides the opportunity to rapidly explore the advantages and limitations of these technologies in the care of individuals with SUD.

Rapid implementation of telemedicine for HCV management of PWID during COVID pandemic

Martinez, A; Sparacino, G; Tahir, M

Hepatology

72, 1, SUPPL, 298A - 299A, 2020

Background:

Telemedicine has been effectively utilized for HCV management in rural and prison settings and recently has been investigated in substance abuse facilities, Colocalized management of HCV and addiction disorders has also been proven to be an effective strategy for microelimination among PWIDs The CoVID-19 pandemic resulted in the need to reduce patient density in outpatient ambulatory clinics making co-localization in a hospital setting impossible In this study we evaluate the rapid implementation and efficacy of telemedicine for the management of HCV among PWID patients

Methods:

We conducted a chart review spanning 14 weeks during the ambulatory care shut down Patient visits were conducted for different reasons including initial (IV) and follow ups (FV) for hepatitis C infection, hepatitis B infection, Liver cirrhosis, HCC, Opiate substitution therapy (OST) and medical marijuana (MMJ) and other chronic liver disease patients Overall 823 patients were seen in the clinic by 3 different providers (1 MD, 2 APPs) The visits were of 3 different types including telephone visit (275), video call visit (473) and face to face visit (65) as feasible in each case Numerous platforms were utilized for video based telemedicine visits Simple descriptive statistics with respect to timeline were calculated using Microsoft Excel See the graphs and images below

Results:

After the shift to telemedicine, we conducted 823 visits Initially 76% of visits were conducted by telephonewith a conversion to 88% video visits by the end of week 2 Patients were more likely to utilize video visits if visits were initiated via a text message and no additional downloads were required Limitations to video visits included: lack of smart phone/tablet; lack of a camera; lack of internet; inadequate data; inability to download an app Of 51 patients seen for initial HCV evaluation, 84 31% initiated treatment

Conclusion:

Telemedicine is an effective modality to manage HCV among PWID patients The modality is especially effective at facilitating initial linkage of PWIDS and overcoming barriers to linkage specifically, lack of transportation. Limitations include slowing of the HCV management cascade from linkage to treatment initiation specifically related to obtaining baseline laboratory data which is otherwise not an issue in a colocalized hospital setting.

Substance use and abuse, COVID-19-related distress, and disregard for social distancing: A network analysis

Taylor, S, Paluszek, M M, Rachor, G S, et al

Addictive Behaviors, 2020, 114, 106754

Research shows that there has been a substantial increase in substance use and abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that substance use/abuse is a commonly reported way of coping with anxiety concerning COVID-19. Anxiety about COVID-19 is more than simply worry about infection. Research provides evidence of a COVID Stress Syndrome characterized by (1) worry about the dangers of COVID-19 and worry about coming into contact with coronavirus contaminated objects or surfaces, (2) worry about the personal socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, (3) xenophobic worries that foreigners are spreading COVID-19, (4) COVID-19-related traumatic stress symptoms (e.g., nightmares), and (5) COVID-19-related compulsive checking and reassurance-seeking. These form a network of interrelated nodes. Research also provides evidence of another constellation or "syndrome", characterized by (1) belief that one has robust physical health against COVID-19, (2) belief that the threat of COVID-19 has been exaggerated, and (3) disregard for social distancing. These also form a network of nodes known as a COVID-19 Disregard Syndrome. The present study, based on a population-representative sample of 3075 American and Canadian adults, sought to investigate how these syndromes are related to substance use and abuse. We found substantial COVID-19-related increases in alcohol and drug use. Network analyses indicated that although the two syndromes are negatively correlated with one another, they both have positive links to alcohol and drug abuse. More specifically, COVID-19-related traumatic stress symptoms and the tendency to

disregard social distancing were both linked to substance abuse. Clinical and public health implications are discussed.

Monitoring drug consumption in Innsbruck during coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) lockdown by wastewater analysis

Reinstadler V, Ausweger V, Grabher AL, et al
Science of the Total Environment, 2020, 757, 144006

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has developed into a serious pandemic with millions of cases diagnosed worldwide. To fight COVID-19 pandemic, over 100 countries instituted either a full or partial lockdown, affecting billions of people. In Tyrol, first lockdown measures were taken on 10 March 2020. On 16 March 2020, a curfew went into force which ended on 1 May 2020. On 19 March 2020, Tyrol as a whole was placed in quarantine which ended on 7 April 2020. The governmental actions helped reducing the spread of COVID-19 at the cost of significant effects on social life and behaviour. Accordingly, to provide a comprehensive picture of the population health status not only input from medical and biological sciences is required, but also from other sciences able to provide lifestyle information such as drug use. Herein, wastewater-based epidemiology was used for studying temporal trends of licit and illicit drug consumption during lockdown and quarantine in the area of the Tyrolean capital Innsbruck (174,000 inhabitants). On 35 days between 12 March 2020 and 15 April 2020, loads of 23 markers were monitored in wastewater. Loads determined on 292 days between March 2016 and January 2020 served as reference. During lockdown, changes in the consumption patterns of recreational drugs (i.e. cocaine, amphetamine, 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, methamphetamine, and alcohol) and pharmaceuticals for short-term application (i.e. acetaminophen, codeine, and trimethoprim) were detected. For illicit drugs and alcohol, it is very likely that observed changes were linked to the shutdown of the hospitality industry and event cancellation which led to a reduced demand of these compounds particularly on weekends. For the pharmaceuticals, further work will be necessary to clarify if the observed declines are indicators of improved population health or of some kind of restraining effect that reduced the number of consultations of medical doctors and pharmacies.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Castile and Leon addiction treatment network: a real-word experience

Roncero C., Vicente-Hernández B., Casado-Espada N.M., et al
Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2020, 11, 575755

Background:

Patients suffering from addiction are a vulnerable group in the midst of COVID-19, so their healthcare is considered essential. In this paper, the measures and responses of the Drug Addiction Assistance Network of Castile and Leon (DAACYL) in Spain during the first 6 weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic are explained. The aim is that this experience could be useful in places where this problem will continue and could help future interventions.

Methods:

A telephone survey was carried out as the main methodology, to collect information for the subsequent organization and repercussion on professionals and patients. This was carried out by the heads of the 18 DAACYL units. Among the interventions applied, the following stand out: implantation of telemedicine techniques, restriction of daily methadone dispensing, suspension of urine controls and initiation of care programs for the homeless.

Results:

As a result of these interventions, the professionals observed that patients are less demanding and mostly stable, with a low percentage of relapses. An increase in the consumption of alcohol and benzodiazepines have been reported as more common among people who relapse. Furthermore, the prevalence of COVID-19 infection in the sample is minimal; therefore, different hypotheses should be considered as an explanation (infra-diagnosis, immune system used to aggression, possible anti-inflammatory effect of some psychotropic drugs and a greater perception of danger against infection than the general population).

Conclusions:

The rapid adaptation and successful implementation of DAACYL have had satisfactory results. On the other hand, the prevention of the possible increase in the development of behavioral addictions and the use of homemade drugs should be considered.

Shifts in drug use behavior among electronic dance music partygoers in New York during COVID-19 social distancing

Palamar, J J, Le, A, Acosta, P
Substance Use and Misuse

Background:

Little is known about how COVID-19-related social distancing has affected illegal drug use. We surveyed electronic dance music (EDM) partygoers—a population known for high levels of drug use—to determine whether their drug use patterns had changed during state-mandated social distancing in New York.

Methods:

Individuals were recruited online and screened for eligibility throughout April and May 2020. We surveyed 128 eligible adults and queried, retrospectively, whether their drug use behavior had changed during COVID-19-related social distancing.

Results:

Most participants reporting past-three-month use reported decreased frequency of use during COVID-19-related social distancing. Specifically, 78.6% reduced frequency of use of cocaine, 71.1% reduced frequency of use of ecstasy/MDMA/Molly, and 68.0% reduced frequency of use of LSD. Although some participants reported increased frequency of use of cocaine (7.1%), ecstasy (7.9%), or LSD (12.0%), 35.0% reported increased frequency of cannabis use. Most (66.7%) of those reporting cocaine use reduced the amount used. The majority of those reporting use of cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine, and/or LSD reported that drug cost (80.0-84.0%) and drug quality (84.2-92.0%) did not change during social distancing. Having a college degree was associated with higher odds for decreasing frequency of cannabis use. Older participants (ages ≥ 23) were at lower odds for decreasing frequency of cocaine use, as were those earning $> \$500$ per week, and participants who attended EDM events biweekly or more often were at higher odds for decreasing frequency of LSD use.

Conclusions:

Participants in this sample tended to reduce party drug use during COVID-19-related social distancing.

COVID-19 related distress is associated with alcohol problems, social media and food addiction symptoms: insights from the Italian experience during the lockdown

Panno, A, Carbone, G A, Massullo, C, et al
Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2020, 11, 577135

Background:

Several scholars hypothesize that one of the most negative impacts of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis would concern the increase of prevalence and severity of both substances and behavioral addiction. Despite the general concerns about the increase of prevalence and severity of addictions related to the COVID-19 emergency, few data are still available. Thus, the main aim of this study was to investigate the association between COVID-19 related distress and: (i) alcohol problems, (ii) social media addiction (SMA) symptoms, (iii) food addiction (FA) symptoms.

Methods:

A national online-survey was carried out during the Italian lockdown (i.e., 9 March 2020-4 May 2020). In the current study, 1,519 participants (365 men and 1,154 women, mean age: 28.49 ± 10.89 years) were included. The survey included socio-demographic related items (e.g., age, sex, residential regions, education level, civil status, tobacco use, etc.), as well as ad-hoc developed questions aimed to investigate COVID-19 related variables (e.g., isolation/quarantine, personal diagnosis to COVID-19, friends or relatives with COVID-19 diagnosis, etc.). Participants also completed the following self-report measures in order to investigate: the psychological impact of COVID-19, alcohol problems, SMA symptoms, FA symptoms, and impulsivity.

Results:

The psychological impact of COVID-19 was independently associated with alcohol problems ($\beta = 0.058$, $p = 0.043$), SMA symptoms ($\beta = 0.259$, $p < 0.001$), and FA symptoms ($\beta = 0.150$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion:

Taken together, our results seem to confirm the general concerns about the negative impacts of the COVID-19 emergency on addictive behaviors, suggesting that this issue should be carefully monitored.

With crisis comes opportunity: Unanticipated benefits resulting from pivots to take-home naloxone (THN) programs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Courser, M W, Raffle, H
Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 2020, 108220

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in stay-at-home orders, which presented a significant challenge to the design and operation of an essential harm-reduction strategy in the opioid epidemic: community-based, take-home naloxone (THN) programs. This commentary describes how four rural and/or Appalachian communities quickly pivoted their existing THN programs to respond to community need. These pivots, which reflect both the context of each community and the capacities of its service delivery and technology platforms, resulted in enhancements to THN training and distribution that have maintained or expanded the reach of their efforts. Additionally, all four community pivots are both highly sustainable and transferrable to other communities planning to or currently implementing THN training and distribution programs.

Current and future potential impact of COVID-19 on kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa* Korth.) supply and use

Singh D, Brown PN, Cinosi E, et al
Frontiers in Psychiatry, 2020, 11, 574483

Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa* Korth., Rubiaceae) is native to and has traditional use in Southeast Asia. The number of kratom users outside of Southeast Asia has increased significantly in recent decades with use spreading to the United States (US) and Europe. Because of its reputed opioid-like psychoactive effects at higher doses, kratom has been regulated in several countries and is subject to an import ban by the US Food and Drug Administration. Nonetheless, in the US it is estimated that 10-15 million people consume kratom primarily for the self-treatment of pain, psychiatric disorders, to mitigate withdrawal from or dependence on opioids, and to self-treat opioid use disorder or other substance use disorders (SUDs). Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, a shortage in the supply of kratom products may place unexpected burdens on kratom users, potentially influencing some who use kratom for SUD self-treatment to regress to harmful drug use, hence increasing the likelihood of adverse outcomes, including overdose. Inadequate treatment, treatment barriers, and increases in the sales of adulterated kratom products on the internet or in convenience stores could exacerbate circumstances further. Although there are currently no verified indications of kratom scarcity, researchers and clinicians should be aware of and remain vigilant to this unanticipated possibility.

Barriers and facilitators to buprenorphine prescribing for opioid use disorder in the Veterans Health Administration during COVID-19

Kelley AT, Dungan MT, Gordon AJ.
Journal of Addiction Medicine
14 December 2020
doi: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000786

Cannabis use during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada: a repeated cross-sectional study

Imtiaz S, Wells S, Rehm J, et al
Journal of Addiction Medicine
14 December 2020
doi: 10.1097/ADM.0000000000000798

Objectives:

In the context of the ongoing coronavirus disease pandemic in Canada, we aimed to (1) characterize trends in cannabis use in the overall population; and (2) characterize patterns of and identify risk characteristics associated with an increase in cannabis use among those who used cannabis.

Methods:

Data were obtained from three waves of an online, repeated cross-sectional survey of adults residing in Canada (May 08-June 23, 2020; N = 3012). Trends were assessed using Cochran-Armitage and chi-square tests, and risk characteristics were identified using logistic regression analyses.

Results:

Cannabis use in the overall population remained stable during the months of May and June. Among those who used cannabis, about half increased their cannabis use compared to before the start of the pandemic. This proportion of an increase in cannabis use among those who used cannabis remained consistent across the survey waves. Risk characteristics associated with higher odds of an increase in cannabis use included residence in the central region (Odds ratio, 95% confidence intervals: 1.93, 1.03-3.62), being 18 to 29 years old (2.61, 1.32-5.17) or 30 to 49 years old (1.85, 1.07-3.19), having less than college or university education (1.86, 1.13-3.06) and being somewhat worried about the pandemic's impact on personal finances (1.73, 1.00-3.00).

Conclusions:

A large proportion of those who used cannabis have increased cannabis use during the pandemic, suggesting a need for interventions to limit increased cannabis use, policy measures to address

cannabis-attributable harms, and continued monitoring of cannabis use during and after the pandemic.

COVID-19 could change the way we respond to the opioid crisis - for the better

Bao, Y; Schackman, B R
Psychiatric Services
71, 12, p.1214-1215, 2020

The US covid pandemic has a sinister shadow - drug overdoses

Arnold, C
BMJ, 2020, 371, m4751

The covid-19 pandemic has worsened the US opioid crisis, and policy changes have not done enough to help. As the United States began shuttering non-essential businesses and closing schools to slow the spread of covid-19 in mid-March, Richard Jorgensen braced himself for the possibility of mass deaths.

Addiction service sees 400% increase in people seeking help during pandemic

<https://www.newstalk.com/news/addiction-service-sees-400-increase-in-people-seeking-help-during-pandemic-1120185>

Fake covid-19 vaccines proliferating on dark web, says new research

<https://www.livemint.com/science/health/fake-covid-19-vaccines-proliferating-on-dark-web-says-new-research-11607927296502.html>

Covid: Lockdown 'devastating' for those affected by alcohol and drug use

A Scottish charity supporting those affected by alcohol or drug use has revealed 1,680 people had asked for help between March and November, up from 935 in the same period last year | Herald, UK
<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/18937664.covid-lockdown-devastating-affected-alcohol-drug-use/>

'Act-as-if you are infected and infectious': what has the global Therapeutic Community movement learnt from COVID-19?

On 25th June 2020, the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities (EFTC) hosted a virtual COVID-19 learning event for practitioners from across the global TC movement. The aim of the event was to bring together TC professionals, from across the world, to reflect upon experiences, challenges and lessons from COVID-19, with a view to consider the future of TCs in both theory and practice | Phoenix Futures blog, UK
<https://www.phoenix-futures.org.uk/about-phoenix-futures/spotlight-on-recovery/phoenix-news-and-views/act-as-if-you-are-infected-and-infectious-what-has-the-global-therapeutic-community-movement-learnt-from-covid-19/>

Analysis finds gaps in care in treating opioid use disorders during pandemic shutdowns

In the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, visits to the doctor declined dramatically. One group of patients that appears to have weathered this trend are those who were already being treated for opioid use disorder | Medical Xpress, USA
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-analysis-gaps-opioid-disorders-pandemic.html>

Top garda reveals impact of Covid-19 on Cork city crime

Pubs and nightclubs closed for long periods while more checkpoints boost drug seizures
<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/top-garda-reveals-impact-of-covid-19-on-cork-city-crime-1.4437703>