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Title
Fentanyl knowledge, attitudes, and safer usage strategies among people who use drugs in the San Diego/Tijuana border region

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Introduction and Rationale

Opioid overdose rates continue to rise in North America among people who use drugs (PWUD) obtained through informal markets. Due to their transnational geography, PWUD in the San Diego / Tijuana border region are uniquely attuned to the vagaries of geopolitical influences on the drug supply. The objective of this study is to characterize and leverage PWUD's drug-safety knowledge, attitudes, and strategies, so as to inform the meaningful design of clinical and public health interventions to reduce the harms caused by the drug supply.

Methods and Evaluation

Between July and August 2022, field researchers conducted 20 English-language semi-structured qualitative interviews of PWUD who are participants in a cohort study in the San Diego / Tijuana border region (Strathdee, et al, 2021). Interviewees were surveyed about their drug use histories, knowledge about fentanyl, and attitudes and practices regarding drug-testing and other harm reduction strategies. They were also asked to provide specific input on San Diego County's plan to expand the availability of drug-testing resources, including fentanyl test kits and Fourier-transform infrared spectrometry. One coder subsequently applied rapid thematic analysis to the transcribed interviews to identify emergent themes.

Outcomes/Results

Three preliminary themes emerged: (1) The drug supply is unsafe due to the ubiquitous presence of fentanyl; (2) PWUD have interest and experience with specific strategies to reduce the harms caused by the drug supply, such as testing drugs prior to use and promoting access to naloxone; and (3) Barriers to these strategies include: (a) the perceived futility of avoiding fentanyl given its ubiquity in the drug supply; and (b) limited knowledge of and access to drug-testing resources.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

This study actively solicited the perspectives of unstably housed PWUD. Drug-use-related harms - including overdose, toxicity from unknown drug adulterants/contaminants, and bloodborne pathogen transmission - disproportionately affect the health outcomes of this population. It is the hope of the researchers to contribute to the development of public health initiatives that address the realities of the members of this population in congruence with their strengths and values.

Conclusions/Future of the Research

PWUD are important stakeholders and sources of expertise in the design of interventions aimed at reducing the harms caused by the drug supply. Clinicians and public health planners should meaningfully consider PWUD's drug-safety knowledge, attitudes, and strategies. The research team plans to continue analysis of the data to better characterize these domains.

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