

Substance use and deaths of despair: Understanding the influence of social factors on individual risk and public health

Emilie Attridge. "Substance use and deaths of despair: Understanding the influence of social factors on individual risk and public health."
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Context

Previous Canadian studies have demonstrated a connection between substance use and social determinants, focusing on high-risk sub-populations (e.g., youth, those experiencing precarious housing, those with past histories of substance use). However, little is known about the social determinants of substance use that underlie "deaths of despair." Few studies have expanded their research into the social determinants of combined substance use (i.e., the use of multiple substances simultaneously), which has been attributed to a high risk of "deaths of despair." This study uses nationally representative data to explore the association between the use of illicit substances, opioids, excessive alcohol consumption, and combined substance use, with individual and population-level risk.

Key finding(s) from the research

Social determinants significantly influence patterns of substance use associated with "deaths of despair."

Population(s) studied: Individuals aged 18-75 from Canada and the United States

Research dataset(s) used: Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2003-2018

Policy implications for this research

The results from this study highlight the importance of addressing the fundamental social factors that cause substance use and misuse, emphasizing the need to monitor social factors in order to understand patterns of mortality related to them. In the context of Canada, the next step will be to expand on the existing research to determine whether the observed inequalities in substance use persist when considering inequalities in substance use-related mortality.

Policy area(s) this research can inform: Families, households and marital status; Health; Immigration and ethnocultural diversity; Population and demography; Society and community

Read the full article

Blair, A., & Siddiqi, A. (2022). The social determinants of substance use associated with deaths of despair: Individual risks and population impacts. *Preventive Medicine*, 164, 107327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2022.107327>.