

# Youth Prescription Drug Misuse: Foundations and Implications for the HIV/AIDS Epidemic

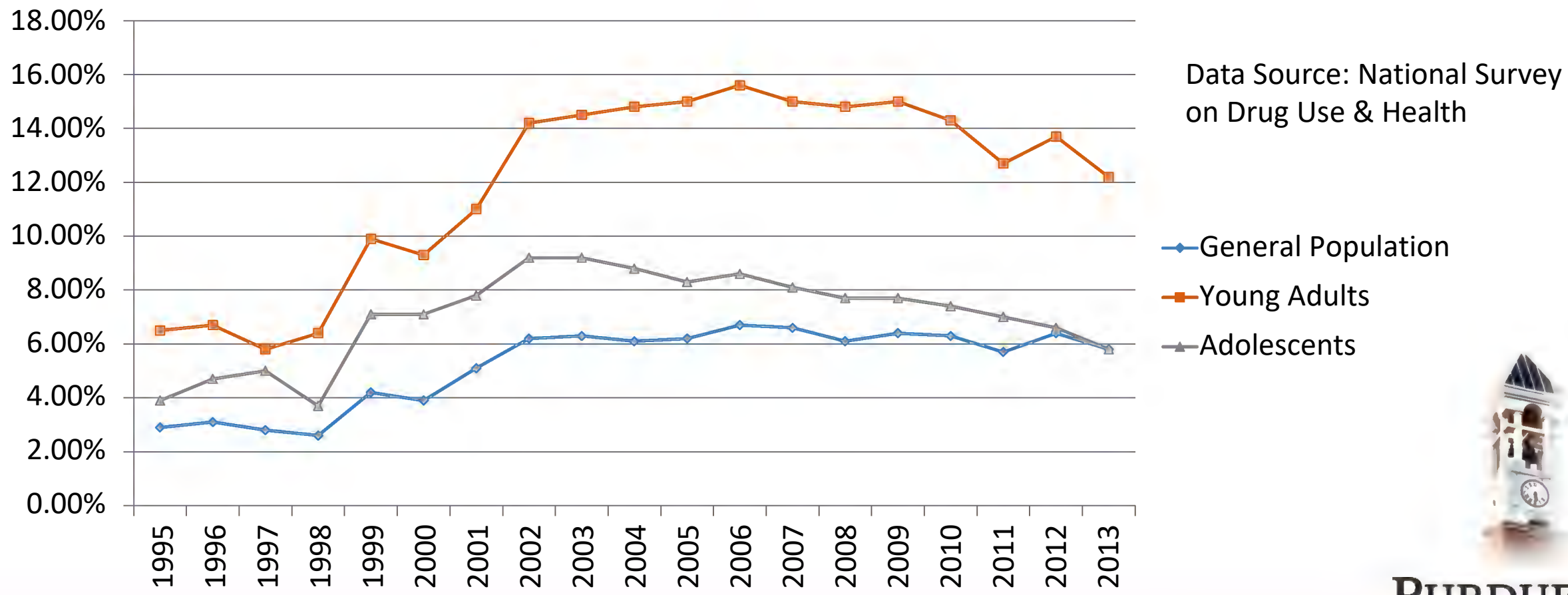
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# Epidemiological trends in prescription drug misuse



# Growth in Problems with Prescription Drug Misuse

- Drug treatment admissions for prescription opioids surged from 1995 to 2005, a 321% increase over the decade.
- Drug-related emergency room visits that involved Rx opioids had a considerable increases from 1995-2004, and continued to increase until 2011.
- In 2011, over 1.2 million ER visits related to prescription drug misuse occurred.
- From 2001-2013, there was a 3-fold increase in opioid related deaths and a 4-fold increase in benzodiazepine related deaths.



# Youth & Prescription Drugs

- During this period, the misuse of prescription drugs has grown most quickly among 18 to 25 year olds.
- Rates of recent prescription drug misuse continue to be highest among young adults aged 18-25.
- Much like with illegal drugs, prescription drugs are widely used recreationally, but in addition they serve a number of functional purposes.



# Pharmaceuticalization

- Pharmaceuticalization - a process where people increasingly perceive variations in the human condition as opportunities for pharmaceutical intervention.
- The increasing reliance on pharmaceuticals goes beyond the treatment of disease and extends to managing aspects of everyday life.



# Impact of pharmaceuticalization on youth drug trends

- The tendency to intervene on perceived problems has led youth to combine prescription drugs with illegal drug use.
- Youth misuse prescription drugs to manage symptoms associated with side effects of illegal drug use.
- Many of these symptoms have parallels to those for which medications are often prescribed:  
Sleeplessness, anxiety, pain, negative affect, fatigue, etc...



Pawson, Kelly, Wells, & Parsons, 2015

# Escalation of Prescription Drug Misuse among Youth

- Some youth escalate to alternative routes of consumption.
- Males are more likely to report escalating to other forms of consuming prescription drugs.
- Heterosexual youth are more likely to report escalating to other forms of prescription drug misuse.
- Social class background, race/ethnicity, and education do not appear to influence escalating prescription drug misuse.



Kelly, Vuolo, Pawson, Wells, & Parsons, 2015.

# Escalation of Prescription Drug Misuse among Youth

- Youth who escalate to smoking prescription drugs report greater problems associated with substance use – even after accounting for their frequency of misuse.
- Similarly, youth who escalate to smoking prescription drugs report greater symptoms of drug dependence – even after accounting for their frequency of misuse.

Kelly, Vuolo, Pawson, Wells, & Parsons, 2015.





# Escalation of Prescription Drug Misuse among Youth

- Pathways to escalation are not merely reactions to increasing tolerance; these are embedded within a web of social relationships.
- Network-related factors have a primary role in the escalation of prescription drug misuse among youth.
- Such factors trump psychological variables entered into the model.

Kelly, Harris, & Vuolo, 2015.



# Relationship of prescription drug misuse to HIV/AIDS

- The pathways for HIV transmission due to prescription drug misuse occur through injection drug use and sexual transmission.
- Sexual risk occurs via behaviors such as condomless sex as well as risk for sexual assault.
- Injection risk may relate to injection of prescription drugs as well as transitions to heroin use.



# Prescription Drugs & Sexual Risk

- Nearly half of young prescription drug misusers report having sex under the influence of prescription drugs.
- White, heterosexual young men are most likely to have sex as well as condomless sex under the influence of prescription drugs.
- Beyond intoxication, some young adults describe strategic uses for prescription drugs in sexual encounters.

Wells, Kelly, Rendina, & Parsons, 2015



# Prescription Drugs & Injection Drug Use

- Heavy prescription drug misuse has escalated transitions to injection of pills, particularly opioids.
- Although having increased with the growth in misuse, injection of prescription drugs remains relatively low overall.
- However, prescription opioid misuse has also been identified as playing a role in the increasing heroin problem within America.



# Prescription Drugs & Transitions to Heroin Use

- Past year heroin use had been stable at about 350k-400k past year users to 2005, but rose 680k users by 2013 (at 0.3% of the population).
- Young adults are a focal point for this rise – among 18-25 year olds, the number of past year heroin users doubled between 2004 and 2013.
- The number of heroin overdose deaths has tripled from 2010 – 2013, most considerably among young men.



# Prescription Drug Misuse Policy Levers

- Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs
- Safe Disposal Programs
- Facilitate Provider Education
- Enhance prevention programs for those who do not use as well as those who do.
- Facilitate Overdose Prevention
- Needle Exchange Programs



# Fears About Needle Exchange

- Syringe exchange programs emerged during the 1980's.
- There were many fears about syringe exchanges expressed at that time regarding increasing drug use, increasing crime, and increasing used syringes in communities.
- These fears were reasonable in the 1980's and early 1990's because there was an absence of scientific data on these programs.
- In 2015, that is no longer the case.



# Syringe Exchange Programs: What They Do

- They have been proven to reduce the transmission of infectious disease.
- They also reduce the probability of infections at the injection site and a decrease in abscesses.
- They reduce the number of used syringes found in communities.
- They reduce the risks of accidental needle sticks and disease transmission to law enforcement.





# Syringe Exchange Programs As Points of Service

- Testing for HIV/HCV/STIs
- Referrals for substance abuse treatment
- Referrals for mental health treatment
- Treatment of Abscesses
- On-site Basic Medical Care
- Overdose prevention training/Naloxone distribution



# Syringe Exchange Programs: What They Do Not Do

- Needle exchange programs do not increase drug use or drug injection within a community.
- They do not lead to increased crime within communities.
- They do not lead to increased used syringes found in communities.
- Needle exchange programs are not a tool of reaction.
- These programs also are not a panacea.



# Reminder When Considering Policy

- Drug users are not merely deviant members of society.
- Drug users are someone's child, someone's sibling, someone's parent, someone's spouse, and someone's friend.
- Outreach to drug users is not simply about changing the lives of individuals; it is about changing the lives of families and communities.

