

How the Current Opioid Crisis Differs from the Heroin Epidemic of the 1960s-1970s: An Analysis of Drugs and Demographics

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Abstract : Heroin has appeared on the drug scene before. Yet the current opioid crisis differs in significant ways. In order to address the grave challenges, this epidemic poses, the unique precipitating and sustaining conditions must be thoroughly examined. This research explored the various aspects of the political, economic, and social conditions that created a 'perfect storm' for the evolution and maintenance of the current opioid crisis. Specifically, the epidemiology, demographics, and progression of addiction inherent in the current crisis were compared to the patterns of past opioid use. Additionally, the role of pharmaceutical companies and prescribing physicians, the nature and pharmaceutical properties of the available substances and the changing socioeconomic climate were considered. Results indicated that the current crisis differs significantly with respect to its evolution, magnitude, prevalence, and widespread societal effects. Precipitated by a proliferation of prescription medication and sustained by the availability of cheaper, more potent street drugs, including new versions of synthetic opioids, the current crisis presents unprecedented challenges affecting a wider and more diverse segment of society. The unique aspects of this epidemic demand unique approaches to addressing the problem. Understanding these differences is a key step in working toward a practical and enduring solution.

Keywords : addiction, drug abuse, opioids, opioid crisis

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