



Drug Overdose Fatality among Recently-released Prisoners in New Mexico: May 2019 to December 2021

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Abstract

Background: Drug overdose deaths are increasing in the United States, and the incarcerated population is at even higher risk of overdose. This study assessed the drug overdose death rate among recently-released prisoners in New Mexico (NM).

Methods: New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD) and New Mexico Office of the Medical Investigator (OMI) datasets were used for this study. The study period was from May 2019 to December 2021.

Results: From May 2019 to December 2021, the NMCD dataset had 6,726 released prisoners' information. OMI-NMCD linked data had 30 confirmed drug overdose deaths of released prisoners for that period. Drug overdose deaths per 100,000 people was 446 per 100,000 released prisoners. 17 (56.7%) deaths occurred within six month after release.

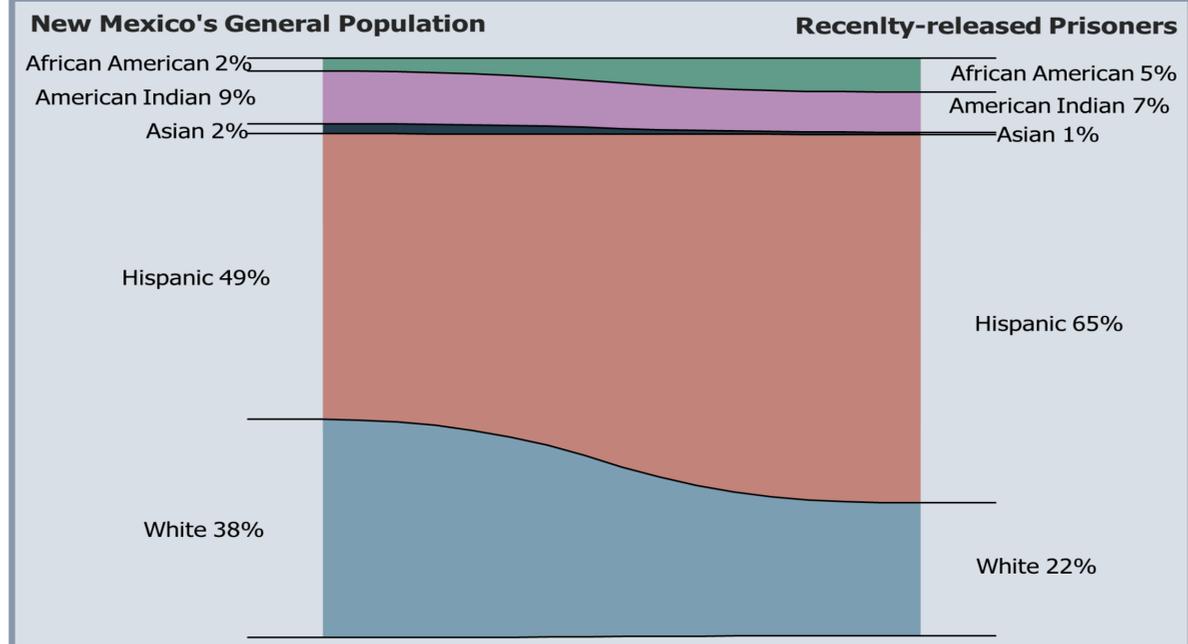
Conclusion: This study indicates that released prisoners have higher drug overdose death rates than state or national average rates.

Background

- Substance use is a rapidly growing public health concern that has reached epidemic proportions.
- Since 1999, drug overdose has killed nearly 841,000 people in the United States (CDC, 2021). Over 100,000 people died of an overdose during 12-months period ending in April 2021 in the United States, according to CDC's provisional data (CDC/NCHS, 2021).
- The incarcerated population is at even higher risk of overdose death due to their many underlying factors, including history of substance use, lower threshold level for substance use, interruption of their treatment, and disrupted social networks.
- NMCD facilities do not provide Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) during incarceration.
- A study in North Carolina showed that former inmates are 40 times more at risk for opioid overdose death than the general population in the first two weeks after release (Ranapurwala et al., 2018).
- This study assessed the drug overdose death rate among recently-released prisoners in New Mexico.

Methods

- NMCD and OMI datasets were used for this study.
- The NMCD dataset includes state prison data only; it does not include county and federal facilities.
- The NMCD and OMI datasets were matched using LinkKing to identify confirmed drug overdose deaths.
- The study period was from May 2019 to December 2021.



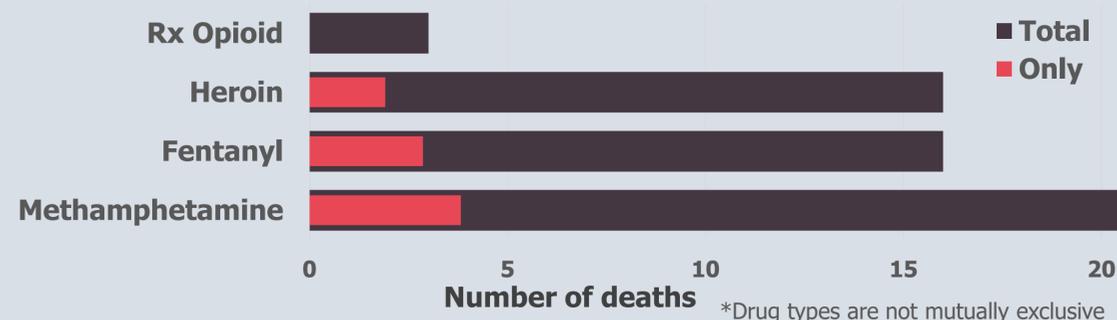
Drug Overdose Death Rate



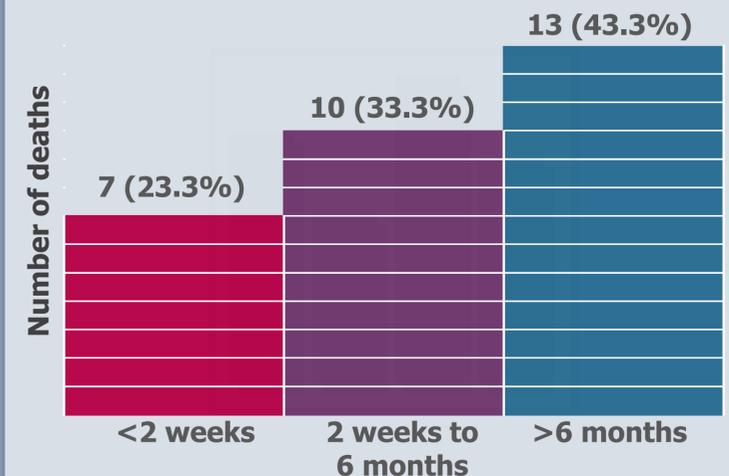
Results

- From May 2019 to December 2021, NMCD dataset had 6,726 released prisoners' information.
- African-American and Hispanics are over-represented among the released prisoners.
- OMI-NMCD linked data had 30 confirmed drug overdose deaths of released prisoners. New Mexico's age-adjusted drug overdose deaths per 100,000 people was 39.0 (in 2020), whereas for the recently-released prisoners, it was 446 per 100,000 released prisoners. The released prisoners' rate was 11.4 times higher than the NM rate and 15.8 times higher than the US rate.
- 23.3% of these overdose deaths occurred within the first two weeks after release, 33.3% occurred within six months after release, and the rest, 43.3%, occurred six months after release. 93.3% (n=28) of the deceased individuals were male.
- 30% (n=9) deaths were due to single drug use, and the rest 70% (n=21) deaths were due to polysubstance (two or more drug) use.

Drug Types and Polysubstance



Time between Release and Death



Conclusions

- This study indicates that released NM prisoners have higher drug overdose death rates than state or national rates.
- Strengthening existing evidence-based programs and introducing MAT treatment to incarcerated individuals and assisting them in a smooth transition back into society may help to reduce the incidence of drug overdose death in this vulnerable population.

References

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