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The Fentanyl Crisis in the African American Community: Exploring Geographic Differences in Overdose in the St. Louis Region

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INTRODUCTION

- Overdoses involving Fentanyl have contributed to increased counts of overdoses involving deaths in the U.S, based on the 100,000 fatalities in 12 months of May 2020-April 2021.^{1, 2}
- When fentanyl was introduced into the drug supply in the U.S., opioid overdose death began increasing disproportionately among African Americans.³
- As of 2020, the overall opioid overdose mortality rate in the U.S. is higher among African American individuals than White individuals for the first time since the overdose crisis began.³
- In St. Louis, fentanyl entered the drug supply in 2016, leading to overdose inequities affecting African Americans similar to national trends.⁴
- Little is known about the geographical characteristics of opioid overdose in the fentanyl era and how it may vary based on neighborhood racial makeup. The current exploratory study investigates geographic characteristics of opioid overdose in St. Louis.

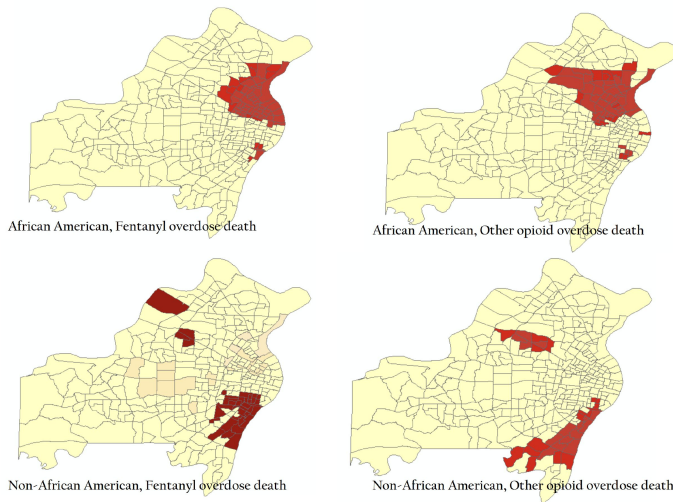
METHOD

- The medical examiner offices from the St. Louis City and County from 2011-2021 collected and coded "drug-involved death" data.
- Included in the analyses were opioid overdoses in the St. Louis region, which were determined by the following criteria:



- Hotspot analysis was used to examine census tracts (i.e., count subdivisions) with significantly higher than expected clusters of opioid overdose death.

Fatal fentanyl overdoses and other opioid overdoses by race in the St. Louis region: 2011-2021



Fentanyl overdose is increasingly concentrated in North City where mostly African Americans live.

References

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4. Banks D, Scroggins S, Paschke M, Shaoham E, Nance M, Cavazos-Rehg P, & Winograd R. (2023, February 7). Examining increasing racial inequities in opioid overdose deaths: A spatiotemporal analysis of Black and White decedents in St. Louis, Missouri

RESULTS

- From 2016-2018, opioid overdose deaths among African American (46.6%) and non-African American individuals (53.4%) were not spatially related meaning they were "randomly" distributed regardless of race.
- Deaths were distinct by race from 2019-2021, (*Moran's I*: -.03- -.06, $p < .05$), with deaths among African American people concentrated in North City/County while deaths among non-African American people were concentrated in South City/County.
- However, in some South City neighborhoods where overdose deaths were high among non-African American people, African Americans were also significantly affected by overdose deaths.

DISCUSSION

- There appears to be a broad, sweeping risk for overdose in North City/County, where neighborhoods are predominantly African American, regardless of opioid type.
- Findings suggest that fentanyl *does* "discriminate" as more recent opioid deaths in the fentanyl era were in different locations based on race.
- As opioid overdose increasingly clusters in African American communities, future research should identify environmental drivers of overdose.
- Some environmental drivers identified by previous studies include poverty, incarceration, low employment and education rates and lack of access to treatment.⁴

A FINAL NOTE

The authors must acknowledge that data used in this presentation represents thousands of individual lives lost in our St. Louis community. This means it also represents thousands of grieving families and friends, and communities that have lost people too soon due to a preventable injury. We hope by bringing awareness to the overdose crisis, that we can honor these lives by preventing future loss.